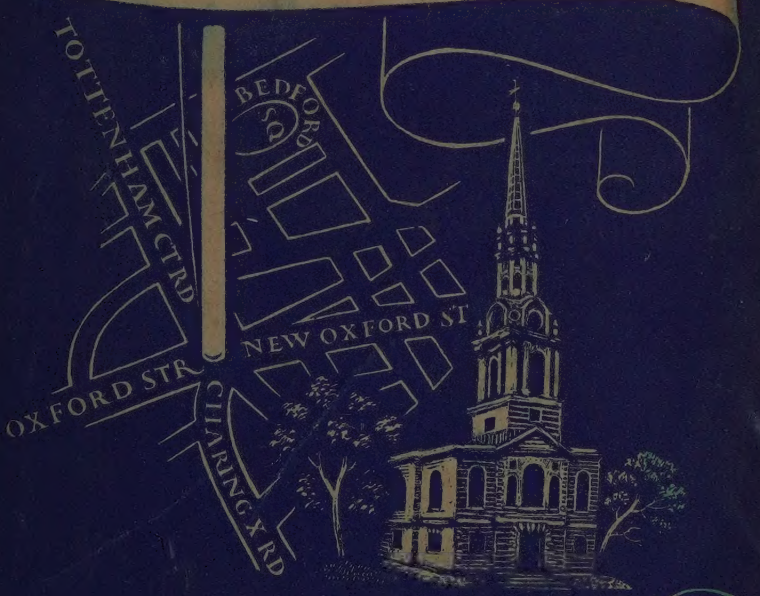
Black Sparta

NAOMI MITCHISON



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NAOMI MITCHISON

Black Sparta

Greek Stories



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To

TWO REAL HISTORIANS,

H. T. WADE GERY

AND

VIVIAN WADE GERY

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A few of these stories and poems have appeared in the *Nation*, the *Weekly Westminster*, the *London Mercury*, the *Spectator*, and *Atalanta's Garland*; and I should like to thank the editors of these for their permission to reprint them. – N.M.M.

THE CHILD JASON IS BROUGHT TO CHIRON

And the Kentaur, dewily laughing,
Caught him up to his breast half-way,
Said: 'Look, see, I am the craftsman!

'With a sight I shall make keener
Than the eagle's, on the wind leaning,
You shall see the plane leaves greenly

'Dancing against the sun; the brook below there
With its long snake's body every moment flowing,
The brook Anauros, hasting, slipping from the snow fields:

'Miles off the young heroes, your friends, coming from the hunting:
The winter shapes of the oaks by chill winds stunted:
The shape of clouds before thunder.

'Your ears shall be certain of hearing
As, through her cropping, the deer's are,
That her ways in the dim wood may be fearless.

'You shall hear the dawn wind in the grass heads:
The lifting slim feet of the marsh birds:
And the stones slipping in the mountain passes.

'You shall smell as the fox does, questing:
Every fresh breeze winnowed and tested
For faint scents that may nest there:

'Earth scents and flower scents better
For heart's joy than feel of bright birds netted
And your own body in the sun sweating.

'I will make you taste as the bear does,
With long tongue and paws sleek and hairy
And the honey sweetness through his heart tearing:

'All pleasant things, hill sheep's haunches roasting,
Apples and cakes, spices that kings' ships boast of,
Hot wine, brightening speech, in the mouth mostly.

'I will teach you touch as a snake, harmless
And warm on its stone, stretched out with scarlet
Slit tiny tongue over the still dust flicking and darting,

'With all its length feels the rocks' ridges and hollows;
Or like a bare nymph with spread fingers lolling
Between cool, wing-filled air, and earth grassy and solid.'

And the Kentaur, quiet and wary,
Smiled at the child staring:
'This too, if man can bear it: –

'You shall see some day, my dreamer,
A sight real not seeming,
Phoibos Apollon and the lyre at his breast that gleams there.

You shall hear one morning in spring time,
As your head whirls and tingles,
The glade suddenly full of the Muses singing.

'As your heart checks and falters
You shall smell, and after, always,
The dark March violets through their bright hair falling.

'You shall taste, wisely and boldly,
That which, laughing, they hold t' you:
The nectar of the Gods in flat cups brimming and golden.

'You shall touch, not in pride nor folly,
But with bowed head, heart unsolaced,
The hair of the Muses and the still hands of Apollo.'

So the Kentaur, secretly smiling,
Took the boy Jason, amazed and silent,
For all the days of his childhood.

THE EXILED OLIGARCHS ARE DRIVEN OUT OF THE CITY

Past striving, they drive us out from the breasts of our city,
Guarded out of the harbour and our city's two arms:
Now for us the salt, unharvested, starved sea is fittest,
Far from our small, walled fields, and the hot vines of our farms.

Ah, parting, our hearts yet hold, tiny, the gay market,
The donkeys' quick feet clicking up the steep streets,
Girls in thin dresses leaning, spinning, against cool archways,
Grape-dripping trellises where a pair of lovers may meet.

And up behind the kind land bears sweet burdens,
Food for men and gods, and fodder, and the wild
Close-growing herbs. And in evenings of slow summer we heard there
Like tiny bells, the tettix, un-netted, earth's youngest child.

Ah how the cold sea, friendless of old, stretches all round us!
That mildew democracy has filled our city now,

Rots its green shoots, tough root-stock. Oh, I have found it
More hateful and sore to me than to raw hill-side the plough!

Oh gods of my city, be pitiful to me leaving,
By the gladness you had of us once, give term to our pain!
Stars rise in the chill sky as our hills flatten, ah grievous,
Ah woe, shall I ever see my own city again?

KRYPTEIA

GERANOR waited, comfortably, leaning back against the rock, alike shelter from the sun and a perfect hiding-place. In front of his eyes the fern leaves were delicate green, under his bare feet the moss was damp and caressing; the tiny dark-eyed spring dripped softly beside him and down through the hollow under the plane bole; beyond, sunlight lay heavily on rocks and gravel of the dry stream bed. The knife rested lightly against his thigh: it was one of his very few own possessions, and he loved it.

Hearing at last the clipping of the goats' hooves far up the path, he drew it, and stood perfectly still, leaning forward a little, while the sounds pattered nearer. He had never killed a man before, but he knew how it ought to be done. If he did this well, they'd hear – the Elders – if Epitadas told them ('and I think he will,' said Geranor to himself, feeling for once that his captain was, after all, not so bad – 'at least he chose me for this, not Pharax!'), if he really said how cleverly it had been planned and carried out, then perhaps they'd let him off a year, and – well – it might make all the difference in a battle, getting a good place.

The he-goat, leader of the flock, came by magnificently, with lifted horns. Geranor looked full into his

shifting, amber eyes, but the goat stepped lightly and fearlessly on, and the others followed, she-goats with swaying udders and kids running beside them. The goat-herd was walking with a swing, by the sound of it, and whistling, not how a slave should go! He brushed past the rock so close that the ferns shook; he carried his long ash stick over his shoulder, spear-wise, like a free man. Geranor knew to an inch his own leap; the knife went into the man's neck, just as he meant it to. For half a minute the goat-herd had been there, the rebel, the danger spot, and now in just one moment he was gone, a tumbled, quiet thing among the rocks, wiped clean out from Sparta. If only Epitadas could have seen!

The moment stayed for a breath or two, silent and sun-filled above the dead helot. Then with a sudden instinct Geranor sprang round, and saw what was coming, caught the stick hard in both hands, tugged it sharply away and got it for himself. But still the boy rushed at him, with a growling noise in his throat like a dog, and all his weight on his hands. Geranor lost his balance and fell, but, practised, fell unhurt and with fingers feeling already for the enemy's throat.

He wanted his knife to finish it off, but the knife was stuck; he had to tie the boy first. And as he did that he was reminded uncomfortably of little Charilas, whom he loved, just the same sort of age as this helot boy, with the same thin wrists and young jutting shoulder-blades. He turned him over and saw his scratched face, wet with tears of anger. One eye on the red knife-hilt, Geranor hesitated: 'Who are you?'

The boy choked and turned his head towards the dead man: 'Father.'

The goats gathered round them, snuffing and tossing their heads at the blood; they bleated anxiously. The still air was thick with the smell of goats and crushed herbs. It was difficult to kill the boy now that he had spoken to him. That first clean, wild leap had felt just right – if he could have gone before it faded. He tugged out the sticky knife and glanced again at the boy; he looked a rebel, and might well be with that father: better clear out the whole wasps' nest. But Epitadas had ordered only the one killing: besides . . . He pulled the dead man's tunic off, used half to clean his knife properly and half to tie the boy's eyes, then bade him walk.

Coming down he had run half the way, proud and barefoot in the moonlight between the rocks; now he went slow, pulling the boy on when he stumbled on the rough slopes. Three times on the way he twisted him round, afraid that the blindfolding was not enough. He would not let him speak, trying to stop him getting any realer or more like Charilas, in case his captain had any more orders.

As they got to the head of the valley it was near sunset; more and more mountain-tops showed themselves, dull blue or rose colour or purple. Suddenly Charilas came bounding down to meet him with, 'Have you done it? Tell me first?' Then threw himself on to Geranor with all his young, dear, clumsy force. 'Oh, I'm glad! I did want you to!' Next, 'Who's that?' and he jumped up and down, staring at

the helot boy, who stood panting and drooping, tired to bits.

'That man's son,' said Geranor, 'you bring him up and I'll go on.' He ran ahead over the crest of the hill and waved his knife as a sign to Epitadas. They were all there, Pharax spreading a cloak to sleep on, the younger ones mostly down in the hollow playing games, and the captain himself sitting on the ground, sharpening a stick.

He came across and explained about the boy: Epitadas tapped the ground rather angrily with his stick: 'If you choose to bring your kid five miles to the butcher that's your affair.' Geranor rubbed his hand across his face, but did not answer his captain. The two boys, still so uncomfortably alike, came up over the ridge; their shoulders were just level. The others ran up and Pharax pulled the bandage off their prisoner's eyes.

He blinked and looked about him; all round there was a ring of Spartans laughing and pointing at him. He thought of all his father had told him, of hopes he was just old enough to share; he pulled himself up straight, trying to realize how soon he was going to die, trying to show them he didn't care: when all the time he did.

'Go on,' said Epitadas.

Geranor half drew his knife: 'I thought – I thought – must I?'

Then Charilas – the dear, knowing what he wanted always – spoke up shrilly: 'Can't we keep him for ourselves? He must be brave to have gone for Gera-

nor!' And then he stopped, suddenly, for fear of the captain.

But the helot boy took a new breath, and all at once he was not at all afraid: this thing had happened to him and swept him clear and there was nothing more to guard. He cried out violently that he would not be their slave, that they could kill him now as they had killed his father! In a great rush he said all the things he had half heard and had not known were in his mind at all: that they, the masters, had no rights, that they had stolen the land – his land! – like dirty, crafty thieves, but let them wait, let them wait a year, the land would go back to the helots who loved it, and Sparta and Amyclæ burnt, and not one left of the proud, thieving murderers!

He stopped, shaken and sweating. The Spartans, astonished as though a sheep had turned and bitten, waited for their captain to stop it; but Epitadas still sat, tapping with his stick till it was all finished. Then he said quietly: 'Who told you that?'

'My father,' said the boy, and his eyelids flickered as that quick run of fire died out of him.

Epitadas was watching him. 'Who else?'

'No one, no one, it's true!'

The captain got up slowly, a great, square, full-grown man. 'You'd better tell,' he said. As he came nearer, the boy made one violent, useless effort to free his hands, and then shrunk back a step or two, looking at the Spartan. The rest of them had seen Epitadas like that before; there wasn't one he hadn't punished for something some time.

Geranor and Pharax, who would soon be captains themselves, looked at one another. Charilas stood biting his hands and whispering: 'Oh I don't want him to! I don't want him to!' But Geranor pulled him back, hoping Epitadas would not notice. It was nearly dark now; he wished he had killed the boy himself in sunlight among the goats.

The boy had been speaking low for a little time, between his teeth, denying everything; then his voice ran up, breaking into a whimper of pain. Most of them had gone away; it was bed time and they were sleepy; and they did not much care to look, any way. Only one or two of the younger boys could not get away from watching it, and Charilas was staring with his mouth open.

Said Geranor, rather loudly: 'The slaves are plotting. You see, Charilas, we have to find out. We don't want all to be murdered.'

But Charilas answered stickily and not to the point, listening to the sounds till Geranor shook him.

Epitadas looked round suddenly. 'He hasn't told. But he'll go to the Elders to-morrow: time enough. Geranor, this is lucky; I shall tell them it was you.' He nodded towards the heap on the ground. 'Give him water. Yes, you, Charilas. As you're so interested, you can guard him to-night. No, Geranor, you've done enough; you must sleep.' He yawned. 'Bring me some water for my hands, too.'

Charilas brought the water. Then he brought more water; he tore strips off his only tunic and soaked them, and put them where he thought they'd help, feeling

about the other boy in the dark. When the rest of the Spartans were all asleep, he laid down his spear and took the young helot's head on his knee.

In the middle of the night Geranor disobeyed orders, got up, and went to him. 'All well, dear?'

Charilas looked up and caught his hand. 'Oh Geranor, he's asleep now, but he's dreadfully hurt, and I don't know what to do! We've been talking.'

'Don't, then.'

'Yes, but I know all about him now, and I've told him about you and me! Oh, can't we help him?' He pulled impatiently at Geranor's fingers, rubbing them up against his face.

'Listen, Charilas: he has been plotting against us, and against our mothers, and against Sparta. You hate this now, but if you are going to be a good citizen, as we both want to be, you have to do things that you can't see the right of at once.'

Charilas said nothing to this, but shut his mouth tight the way Geranor knew so well. He was stiff with holding the boy's head quiet on his knee. Geranor looked at him, but could not think of anything more to say; these were the times one has to go through when one is growing up. He had been unhappy himself and got it over. But what was the good of saying that to Charilas? One always thinks one's own pain is worse. He sighed and looked about him and went back to sleep.

After a long time a colder wind began to ruffle among the mountain-tops. The star which Charilas had been watching grew fainter; the bushes on the

ridge to the north-east stood out in sharper outline. He looked down and saw the helot boy was painfully wide awake with open eyes, but still. 'What is it?' he whispered quickly: 'Water?'

The boy shook his head very slightly, so that the tears rolled out of his eyes. There were no words, there was no single desire, that could show anyone, even the kindest, the bitterness beyond fear that he was full of now. He tried to speak, to tell Charilas all the things he did want: sun-rise, and his mother, and goat bells and wild strawberries, the smell of his hay bed at the croft, and just having found out how to make pipe tunes. He could not go on with it. He was dumb with pity of himself and knowledge of the darkness he was going into, alone. Nobody else could understand.

He sighed with a deep shiver all down his body, and Charilas shivered too. 'Perhaps they won't kill you if you tell quick,' he said. But the other drew himself together like a hurt beast in a trap: 'They will, they will. I could have stood it with father, but I shall be all alone there too.'

He was crying steadily now, and Charilas could not stop himself from doing the same. 'Oh, I am sorry, I am,' he whispered, half to himself, and the helot answered him hopelessly: 'Not sorry enough to let me go.'

The dawn spread, enough for him to see the boy he was guarding and be seen by him: not enough yet to get a sight of any of the others. Would they never wake? He began to wonder what death must be like, not the fine death in battle or old with honours that

he had always imagined, but when one was young and frightened and hurt already. Very slowly the horror of it began to get into his mind, and it seemed to him that he had never thought outside himself at all before. He had a knife; he could have loosed the boy, given him a chance at least, let him crawl away somehow. He went on thinking till he was nearly sick. He threw the knife as far as he could down-hill. It stuck in a tuft of prickles a long way down the slope and glittered at him now and then.

At last Geranor woke, and the others. He wanted to eat with them all, to make it the same morning it always was, but the cold porridge stuck in his throat. After their breakfast, Epitadas and Geranor and two more took the prisoner off down hill to the Elders, to be hurt again worse, and die. He thought the boy was looking at him, as if he would have said something; he couldn't bear it; he ran away, pretending he had been called for.

The day passed, sleepy and heavy-aired for him after his night awake. When the sun was past midday whatever it was must have happened. Before any of the others he heard the voices coming back, but he hid behind a rock in the hollow until he could ask Geranor alone what had happened: 'Did he tell?'

'Oh yes, he told. Not very much of a plot. We shall have it seen to in three days.'

'What happened to him?'

'He's dead. I'm sorry.'

Charilas let go his lover's hand. 'Oh, he's not!'

Geranor moved impatiently: 'It can't be helped.

They were trying to hurt Sparta. I hated that part of it too, only why we did it made it right.'

But Charilas only sobbed: 'Oh, I wish I'd let him go! I don't want to be a good citizen!' And he threw himself down on the grass, hitting it with his feet and fists.

Geranor sat down beside him, wondering how to stop this, seeing Charilas getting very near the edge of something dreadful. Charilas with his brown hairy arms stiff and quivering, gripping at the stones. Charilas with his head turned away from his lover. Best to be patient and talk of something else. 'Here's something good for both of us, though. The Elders thanked me themselves, truly they did, and I'm to be captain next year instead of Pharax, and next time we go to war . . . Charilas, aren't you glad?'

'No!' said Charilas heavily, turned away still. 'I don't care. Everything's gone wrong, and I won't love you any more.' And he stuck his face into the turf and went on crying, and his tears soaked down . . . to the earth of Sparta.

CHARILAS, IN EXILE, REMEMBERS SPARTA

'Oh bright Apollo,
Through pathways narrow
We rise and follow
Thy fleeting arrow.

But sharp and thorny
The hills we play on:
The leaves have torn me
That once I lay on.

(With shining laurel
For hand and head
But rue and sorrel
For tears unshed.)

Oh God, who sharest
Our flashing races:
With a fence of faces
We ring the fairest.

And he is leading,
But while he dances
With swords and lances
His sides are bleeding.

(With shining laurel
For hand and head,
But rue and sorrel
For tears unshed.)'

O LUCKY THESSALY!

The Grand Duke Thorax of Thessaly had his great house by the side of the river Peneios, which was, here, fairly still and level, with deep, sloping banks bordered with planes and poplars and alders. Behind them, orchards and cornfields: further back still, the plain of Thessaly, rising and falling gently, broken every few miles by stony wide stream beds, now mostly dry: between them great acres of unfarmed, sun-bleached land where the Grand Duke and his friends pastured their horses. Down from the house to the river there was a rough slope, where the stones had mostly been cleared. It was planted with apples, pears, and, at the end, large cool willows, soaking their roots in the wet bottom of a lovely reed-bed. Thorax and two or three of his friends were walking and talking here. Every now and then they were interrupted by country people coming along the path by the river with urgent matters for the Duke to hear about: quarrels and marriages, births and deaths, the whole of Thessaly imaging itself, lively and small, under his eyes. This was always rather trying for the others, who were older, but Thorax was still young enough to enjoy doing several things at once; besides, he could see much better this way how matters were going with his country, than by any amount of things

told, however trusted the teller. Time enough, when he was old, to wall in the orchard.

Hippokleas and another boy were wading down the stream along the edge of the reed-bed with long sticks in their hands, looking for eels or bulrushes or old water-hens' nests or tortoises, or even an unusually soft and attractive patch of mud under their toes. They talked low to one another in dancing voices, so that now and then a word or a laugh would be cast up into the orchard. Thorax and Phrikias came nearer to watch them. The cold, quick water frilled up into a continuous ripple at the back of their knees; the sun dappled them through the willows. Suddenly both flung themselves into the reeds, after some ridiculous, wet plaything which had just become the immediate object of life. For a minute they squabbled damply and happily till something else turned up. Through a gap in the reeds Hippokleas smiled up at Thorax, all at once a little aware of being rather muddy and childish, and slipped after his friend behind the next clump. His trainer came grumbling down from the house, a large man, unnaturally tidy. 'He's no business to be there!' he said, casting a gloomy eye at Thorax. 'He's been in the water hours. It'll rot the legs off him!'

'Nonsense!' said the Grand Duke with a great swing of his cloak.

'Well, my lord, if you know better! It's no affair of mine now!' said the man, checking and gradually growing rather still as Thorax frowned at him, then went back rather inconspicuously through the orchard. After all, his job was over, finished with every success:

if the Grand Duke chose to pay him the extra six weeks, up to the time of the Feast, well, that was of course his due, but he didn't always get it. In another month he would be home in Athens where there were no Grand Dukes and he could be, on the whole, as rude as he liked to anybody.

Thorax let the cloak trail again; it was too hot to wear, though one might use it to impress people with, and if any more discontented farmers came along the river path for good advice, they expected to see their Duke in scarlet and tassels. Phrikias stooped and pulled a couple of burrs out of its border: he always found himself doing little odd things, half fatherly, half courtly, for Thorax: his own cloak was blue, with dignified gold stars worked on it. He looked back at the trainer: 'All the same, he is perhaps right. No good to let the boy get out of practice now. And surely he ought to have a better idea of himself than to be dabbling in mud at his age!'

'I'm not sure,' said Thorax. 'There's nothing so boring as a boy who has a good idea of himself! Don't you ever want to stick your toes in when you see a nice smooth patch of mud, Phrikias? No, I suppose you don't. But I do. It's like seeing a nice girl. But about Hippokleas: we shan't send him in again yet, shall we?'

'No, not after winning at Delphi.' Phrikias blinked solemnly and peered through the reeds at the sleek, gleaming body of his son, and tried to remember how he had felt in the days when he himself had been like that.

'In another two years perhaps, at Olympia, or we

might wait till he's half grown-up – in the next class anyway. Don't you think so, Phrikias?'

'Yes,' said Phrikias, and both heard in the quiet behind them the flump of ripe apples falling into the grass.

One of the others spoke: 'And the Feast's to be next full moon, Thorax? – where all the world's to hear about you and Hippokleas!'

'Yes,' said Thorax, 'if that blessed brother of mine gets back with this poet he's collected.'

'He ought to be here by now.'

'How intelligent of you – he ought! My good fool,' said the Grand Duke, 'if it were anyone but my young brother he'd have been back years ago!'

'Poets sometimes take catching,' said Phrikias gently.

'Don't I know it! If he'd gone the right way about it he'd have got Simonides as I wanted, and goodness knows the old brute owes it to the family! But of course Thrasydaios goes and offends him, silly young ass, and off stalks Simonides and the gods know what he mayn't write about us now!'

'But this man he's got –'

'Pindar. A Theban. No one's ever heard of him. But just because Thrasydaios found someone in Athens who knew the man, we have to have him – no stopping them in time! There they were started! But if he doesn't make a good song out of Hippokleas, I'll skin him alive, by Apollo I will!'

'Let us hope he's a gentleman at least,' said Phrikias, and the Grand Duke stuck out his black beard and laughed in the kind of way that made it very difficult

for the others to say anything more. This was one of the things that failed to make Thorax really popular among his nobles, though it delighted the farmers who liked a lord to be a lord. And old Phrikias, though he had been disappointed not to have one of the poets he knew about to celebrate his son's victory in the great race at Delphi, was still sorry for this unknown Pindar when he actually arrived.

In the meantime Hippokleas had come out of the river and rubbed the mud off his feet; he had also left his various sticks and reed-boats and bits of pith and odds and ends in a pile on the bank where his friend, Hybrestas, could look after them. He had heard what the trainer said, and, though he felt that it would perhaps be silly to come out at once, he had taken it very seriously and got back to land as soon as he thought he decently could. Hippokleas, at sixteen, had a great power of respecting people whom he supposed to be older and wiser, including his trainer, and also the Grand Duke, who was not, after all, either so very old, or ever at all unkind in the way the wise are apt to be – but still, definitely a grown-up, and one to whom he not only felt he should be, but actually was, grateful: because his father, though everyone liked him so much and though he had been a good athlete himself twenty years ago, could never possibly have managed and paid for his training in the completely competent way Thorax had. As he came towards them the water streamed down him into the tufts and dust of the dry orchard. He seemed to collect all the light, and to reflect the sun between the trees again and again.

Compared with him, everyone else, even the Duke in his hot scarlet and yellow, seemed flat and dull and used-up. He joined in, rather shyly, but not at all bothered by Thorax laughing that way: 'Don't we even know what he's like, then?'

'Well, my love,' said Thorax, 'all the poets I've known have been scraggy, middle-aged, mangy nanny-goats – men and women too. He's bound to be in that style.'

'Oh,' said Hippokleas, and considered a minute, 'but if no one knows him, mightn't he be very young?' He did hope so!

'I doubt it,' said Thorax, 'I don't think even Thrasydaios would be ass enough to bring a boy who's never even been tried. Of course it would be just like my young brother.' He broke off at a new noise behind him and looked towards the house. They all looked. 'By God,' he said, and brought his hand down so hard on Hippokleas' shoulder that the boy jumped like a waking deer, 'I believe you're right!'

In the middle of the group coming towards them through the trees, there were three or four obvious travellers, with sleeved cloaks and felt hats and dust enough to show up a hundred yards off. The one unknown face was plain immediately. Thorax whispered to himself, but loud enough for the others to hear and wonder exactly what furies he was, for the moment, suppressing: 'So that's Pindar. . . . He hasn't even got a beard!'

Under the biggest of the trees presentations followed, the poet to Thorax and such of his court as

were there or had quickly gathered when they heard there was something new to be seen. One of them had the not altogether brilliant idea of telling two of the household musicians to come and play, wandering up and down the orchard, as the Duke liked them to – sometimes. But the flute notes dropping in little wild oblongs seemed to worry not only Thorax, but also the new-comer. They had brought him water for his hands and feet and linen towels with embroidered ends. Hippokleas had poured wine for him and the rest, listening hard. But Pindar seemed not to want to talk very much; he kept on ducking his head, so that he looked up at Thorax from under straight dark eyebrows. His face was a transparent, sun-burned white, very bloodless, except by moments when he seemed to become conscious of some vaguely painful atmosphere and flushed for a minute at a time. Thorax was being polite and superior to him; one must, presumably, see what the fellow was like, and what could be got out of him: everyone in Thessaly knew about the feast the Duke was giving for Hippokleas, who had brought honour to his friends and his country, and about the grand poem the Duke was hiring a poet to make and have sung there. No putting it off. And no time to get another poet. He would talk to his brother that evening! But in the meantime he was quite pleasant to Pindar.

And Pindar said less and less, and ducked his head more and more, and jumped and swore softly when an apple fell just behind him. Phrikias filled up gaps in the conversation. Hippokleas stared and wondered how much older and how truly wiser than himself the

stranger poet could be. Suddenly in a pause Pindar looked up and said: 'Now what can you give me – how big a chorus? What music? Can I do what I like with them? I must train them myself, do you see, and it'll be something new, not what they're used to! Will you see that they do what they're told? One never knows how much sense people have,' he subsided, and then went on, just as suddenly, before anyone could answer: 'And I must be alone to write when I choose. But I mayn't choose! I may want to be out here among you all.' His quick eyes shifted from Thorax to Hippokleas, then, passing the rest, on to the river, horses drinking at the far side, and, at this, the ripe apples only just hanging to the boughs.

Thorax answered him, with more interest, and only very faintly annoyed. Chorus and harp-players were to be all he could wish. If–*if*–he made a good thing for them, no money was to be spared in producing it. And of course his name would be made: everyone would hear of this feast. Here Pindar interrupted rather rudely to say that his name was already known in Thebes and 'part of Athens'.

Thorax laughed a little; it might have meant anything. 'But I insist on the best,' he said, 'always. And it's apt to be the worse for someone if I don't get it.'

'I'm always after the best too,' said Pindar surprisingly, 'I think I'm going to be able to work here. I've got an idea. Two ideas in fact.' That seemed to be the end of his conversation; he began to move his fingers and purse his lips; the flute playing seemed to annoy him more and more; by and by he felt for his tablets.

All that night Hippokleas kept on waking up and wondering what Pindar thought of him. The evening before he had been at supper with Thorax and everyone, but sitting perfectly douce and still beside his father and sent away before the end. Pindar was between them and Thorax, talking a great deal and eating as though he enjoyed it more than most people. They asked him to sing, which he did at once, with no sort of shyness, a song about Thetis coming up the beach, by Korinna: 'An old duck!' said Pindar, 'and kind – she'd give away the last penny in her house!'

'But not really a great virtue in women!' said Thorax, and almost everyone laughed: he had himself, because it seemed more grown-up to, but not very loud. Only Pindar didn't; he said: 'She's been all right to me!' and frowned and shut up and wouldn't say any more, unless perhaps he had later when Hippokleas had gone to bed? Anyhow, he had managed to make some of the others look uncomfortable, even if he'd had to be himself too. But Hippokleas liked him for that; so often he'd had friends of his own laughed at, stupid, nice people like his father, silly, dear people like Hybrestas who had been paddling with him, or jolly, incompetent people like Thrasydaios. He thought that when one was grown-up the rest of the world stopped laughing at one's friends. But Pindar was grown-up – wasn't he?

He knew Pindar wanted to be left alone to work, but next morning he couldn't help it – he went over to his room and very, very quietly drew the curtain back, just an inch. Pindar was saying bits of things

aloud, repeating them sometimes, half singing the words over and over as if they were very juicy little lumps of meat. Sometimes a single word would fascinate him, and he would go on repeating it until apparently it lost its meaning altogether. Then he would throw the dry thing away and get out another. Or it might be the beginning of a tune rather than words. Most of the time he sat on his bed, staring, with his head up, against the blank wall opposite, and kicking his feet against the hanging bed-clothes; he seemed to have dressed quite properly but then to have rolled about in his things, till the cloak was twisted round him anyhow; Hippokleas wanted dreadfully to put it straight. Sometimes he got up and began walking about or jumping from one foot to the other. He pulled at those beginnings of beard that Thorax had been so doubtful about. All of a sudden he was facing the curtain. 'Come in!' he said, and Hippokleas did, more frightened than he'd ever been in his life before. 'This is the plan!' said Pindar without waiting a moment, 'first there's to be Thessaly and just a touch of Sparta because of the new treaty: your Duke wants that in and it fits my song, so he shall have it. That makes the solid base of the song to start with, nothing to shock anyone yet! And then there'll be you: you, I think, at some length, Hippokleas. And your father. And happiness. That's the thing I want: what's happiness? We'll have it sung of the fairy people, the people of the north, laughing like mad things at the bucking, braying he-asses! And the dancing and the jig tunes, the hosting of the fairies with golden leaves in their

hair! That's to go to your heads, that pure sheer happiness with no bite at the end! And my tune to drive it in!'

'Is it – oh is it that dancing one you were singing just now?'

'Yes, yes! And then there's Perseus, Danaä's son, he went there, and then he killed the Gorgon with the thin snakes all round her face. Nothing's impossible for the gods, not even letting men be happy! And then – oh then it'll be you again, Hippokleas, you with everyone in love with you, boys and girls, no happiness you shan't have! You in a light of song, swamping their hearts with warmth and beauty and gentleness. You, like I saw you yesterday.'

He was suddenly very close to Hippokleas, who was standing quite still with his hands up to his face. Pindar's eyes were bright and hard and hot with the tensing of muscles all about them, the quickening of blood; and the other's were soft and shifting, over the tips of his fingers spread tight across the cheeks below. 'What – what do you want?' he said, and then, 'You must be a very great poet!'

At that, surprisingly, Pindar gave a little jump into the air like a bird, and his eyes quieted. 'I will be!' he said. 'And after that I shall go on about Thorax, because I like him. He's quite real. He knows what he wants. I can write songs, and you can run quicker than any boy in Hellas, but to Thorax God gave the gift of living! And after that Thrasydaios and the other brother, I suppose, and all Thessaly like a big sailed ship piloted between splendid harbours. What do you make of it, Hippokleas? Will it be a good song?'

Hippokleas thought for a moment, he wanted to be sure he was saying exactly what he meant to say. 'It's going to be about a great many things, isn't it? Will they all fit together?'

'Yes, yes!' said Pindar, 'that's the whole point! It's being happy, it's a holiday song. It darts about like the beam of a lantern shifted quickly, a spot of brightness on moving water, like a bee over a hillside in Spring, hundreds of different coloured, different scented flowers! It puts a bloom on things, it makes the bloom catch the light like a bunch of grapes that you turn round slowly looking for the best! Now it's Perseus, now it's you.' He suddenly stopped, looking again at the blank wall, with his mouth opening and curving to a grin and his fingers playing with the folds of his tunic. 'I'll put that in!' he said, 'like that, like I said, "the bloom of the holiday song and it flits and it darts –" and the tune, the tune like this –' He caught up his lyre off the bed and hunched himself over it, his face stuck out and intent, humming a tune, a little mad buzzing, jingling thing like the fairy dancers.

Hippokleas hoped he would talk again, but it was no good. Minutes went by and Pindar didn't look at him, didn't think of him. He went out again softly, with the memory of that moment they had stood side by side shaking and tossing him to low laughter and then surprising, choking tears.

Hippokleas didn't want to do anything with Hybrestas that day. He shook him off, crossly, and took himself off to ride and think about Pindar. After a time he found he wanted to go home, to get right back into

himself and his oldest life of all, to work it all out from that safe and quiet refuge. He had a white pony mare in the paddock at the back of the Grand Duke's house. Mostly he rode bare-back, but to-day he saddled her and went steadily west along the track to Pelinna, his own father's town, higher up the river. The plain heaved up slowly towards low hills with a different kind of soil, and then bare rocks and bushes. He crossed the highest ridge and trotted on quicker, into the river-bed again. At noon he bathed and unsaddled the pony and let her roll; then he went on upstream between higher hills and so into a new plain, where his home was, and not Pindar. In the evening Pelinna came in sight, on a rise of land between two of the rivers, a long village with their house at the end of it. Everyone called out to him as he passed their doors, and the girls spinning outside in the cool threw him kisses. But the mare went soberly on and he dismounted at his father's door. He did want to have all the old things round him again. They were, in a way, reassuring when he got to them, but not completely; something unstable had come into life, as though one couldn't go on being sure of next year. In the dusk he tiptoed about feeling things with the tips of his fingers and his rounded palms, stealing along a wall, past a water-jar and a big chest that smelt of winter clothes, and slipping quickly through a doorway into another still room, trying to surprise it into giving him back something. But the essential magic had gone out of things; they no longer had powers of love or fear over him, as they used to have from his childhood to the last day he had

been among them. He was suddenly a stranger in his own house, because Pindar did not know it, had never seen it, was not there to bring the dead things to life again for him! And then his mother called him into the women's rooms, and there were his two sisters exactly the same as ever, one at her embroidery and the other sorting out herbs to boil for cow medicine, and both of them chattering like magpies about nothing at all! Not a word or a look changed there! – and never could be whatever happened to them, even after they married and had babies they could still go on sewing and making herb drinks just as their grandmothers had. He stayed with them that evening, liking it at first and then suddenly beginning to get very tired of it, and went to bed early, and the next morning started just after dawn, east again to Larissa and the great house by the river.

This time at supper Pindar kept on glancing at him and spoke directly to him once or twice. Thorax watched them and thought that this young poet of his brother's was perhaps more competent than he had supposed, and was at any rate, behaving like a gentleman and one of spirit. On the other hand it would be bad for Hippokleas to be upset. Thorax was fond of him and proud of him too: some day he would do honour to Thessaly again. During supper there were acrobats with ribbons at their elbows and knees and middles, who danced in and out of sword arches and on coloured ropes across the room, or bent themselves double backwards and walked upside down like that between the tables. And there was a girl with six fingers on each

hand who went round and let you really pinch them. And Thorax thought what a funny world it is where some people have six fingers and some are poets, and the best sort of people are Grand Dukes and pay the others to come and amuse them. Hippokleas liked it best when all the acrobats stood on one another's shoulders and waved rosemary branches dipped in quince blossom oil. He thought that he and Hybrestas and some of the others might learn to do that – not the branch waving but the climbing up and balancing; it would be useful for birds'-nesting too. When he had gone out, Thorax leant over to Pindar: 'He's a dear boy, my Hippokleas.'

'And beautiful,' said Pindar.

'You're not in love with him already?'

Pindar laughed: 'The song's got to be written, hasn't it? I'm doing everything in my power to get you what you want, Grand Duke of Thessaly!'

'Well, as to that –' said Thorax, then, half to himself, 'What I should have asked was: Is he in love with you?'

But Pindar either did not hear or did not heed. Two days later it was written, and Pindar began rehearsing his chorus, cursing them up and down if they did things wrong or too slowly. Almost all of them were older than he was, but he didn't seem to mind. He was difficult to work for because he knew exactly what effect he wanted to produce, but not nearly so exactly how to do it. Sometimes it didn't come the way he thought it was going to. Then he always lost his temper suddenly and overwhelmingly,

and raged and stamped and threw things about, and sometimes shook one of the chorus. They got used to him in time and looked forward with secret amusement to these outbursts. But it frightened Hippokleas when he came to look on.

By this time he did very little but think and dream about Pindar, imagine times and places for them to meet, talk, look at one another, he hardly knew what else. Only when Pindar touched his hand or neck he would shake all over and his heart tightened and heaved against his ribs more painfully than at the end of any race. He did not want to play games or run or hunt or do anything with the others. It worried Hybrestas terribly, he did not know, could only guess what it was; and he did not like to guess, he shied away from the idea of love when there were such lots of things for them all to do together: not going off into corners as if one had hurt oneself! The others didn't like it either; some of them even said that Hippokleas was too pleased with himself now to have anything to do with his old friends, and one day they'd show him what happens to people like that. But they didn't really believe it, they were much too proud of him themselves; he still had the glory on him.

And besides, that wasn't what was the matter with Hippokleas: clearly not. Hybrestas knew, and if the others didn't take the trouble to find out, he must, he who'd always been the greatest friend, who'd seen that race won – But Hippokleas would not talk to him or to his father, or to anyone: not yet. Up and down the river path, in the house, in the fields, in the orchard,

Hippokleas would go, and his friend followed him, longing for the old days that he still felt were the right ones, when they both found everything in the world interesting and funny. Sometimes Hippokleas would turn on him and send him away with hard words, hitting him and most likely getting hit back. After a quarrel like this Hybrestas would swear he'd go and never come near him again, or else be sorry, so sorry for the moment as to drive out the other thing, and for a little time they would play frantically at something, till Hippokleas began to grow quiet again, and stopped being interested, and went away.

Round about the house, or wherever Pindar might possibly be, he would be listening all the time, knowing by heart every tone of the voice, every step on stone floor or turf. And yet when Pindar did come into the room where he was, or on to the river-bank where he was lying, he would often get so frightened that he had to run from the real thing back to his dreams again. Sometimes Pindar would look for him then, and they would talk – marvellously – but just as often he would forget to: his head was so full of the song. Hippokleas fretted, and did not always eat proper dinners, or do exactly what people told him to. After a time his father noticed it and spoke to Thorax. They talked it over together, but finally decided in the old and wise manner that there was nothing to bother about. They quoted several admirable poems about love to one another, laughed a good deal and let it be. Thorax was beginning to be distinctly impressed by the way the song was shaping. He need not be ashamed of his poet after

all. He even said as much to his brother, and that was going a long way.

Then it was the evening before the feast. Everyone was excited and nervous, Pindar most of all. For the first time for days he felt unsure of himself. He found Hippokleas by himself in one of the courts, sitting on a bench, watching a spider walk up the wall. He turned and half rose to go, but Pindar took his hand and sat down on the seat beside him, holding him gently. 'I love you,' said Pindar. Hippokleas stiffened a little but seemed prepared to receive it. He said, 'I love you too.' For a time neither said anything more; the same atmosphere of kindness and closeness wrapped them both round like a still, painted flame, urging them very slowly nearer to one another, their hands and arms and lips and whole bodies. They found it very delightful to say one another's names.

Then, while Hippokleas was still bathed in it, body and soul, not even conscious of his own intense happiness, Pindar began to come awake and see himself. He had always been more or less aware of this splitting of himself, the way one-half could watch and comment and even laugh at the other; but never so acutely as now. This watcher, this other self, who, in observing, spoilt things and stopped him having them whole, enjoying every sense as a man should! – as Hippokleas did. Suddenly he was full of sharp envy for Hippokleas and revolt against his god Apollo, and the Muses, whose slave he was, who would not let him escape even for a little moment of loving! As all this went bitterly through his mind he shifted a little way from Hippokleas, and

the boy's grip tightened across his chest and shoulders. He said 'It's no good,' and then had to see Hippokleas stare straight into his eyes, had to meet that look of something breaking, some beauty, save it if he could, even for a time, even for a few hours. He said quickly, and it was true enough, though so little what he had meant: 'It's the song, Hippokleas. I'm very anxious about it: you don't know how badly. It's my first big thing!'

The look was healed again. Hippokleas smiled and said: 'You needn't be. It's – oh, you can trust me not to tell you lies! – better than anything I've ever heard or imagined. It's alive all through. It's so lovely that when I hear it really sung to-morrow, I think I shall go mad! Oh Pindar, you must know you are a great poet.'

'Am I?' said Pindar, 'Am I? Are you sure?' He felt himself dropping through all this lovely praise into profound gulfs of despair, because, even if this song was good – and he half knew it was – yet it was all a chance that the breath of God-head had for the moment been blown through him, it might never happen any more! By himself he could not ever have done it. And would his God come to him again? This was the other side of the slavery, this terrible longing for possession, to be used again as the instrument of Their will. But Hippokleas was kissing his hands, kneeling in front of him, telling him over and over again all sorts of soothing and comforting things, with tremendous effort and aching of spirit dragging him up, limp and heavy, from the unhappy gulfs. Suddenly he was up again, in the sun and air and scent of myrtle bushes. 'Will it be all right, then?' he said.

And 'Yes!' said Hippokleas, 'oh yes, I know it will!'

'If you say so, then that's sure!' said Pindar. 'Come on, let's do something before supper. No more trying it over now – nothing till the day! What shall we do?'

All at once Hippokleas knew that he was grown up, that he himself was older and wiser than somebody, and that somebody a poet! It was in his hands to make this other happy and comfortable; he considered carefully whether they should play something, ball or quoits, or an indoor game, or whether they should ride or walk in the fields. At last he said: 'Come up the river, in one of the skin-boats; you never have. I'll paddle it. I shan't upset you. You can just lie and look at things, and listen to the water. And please be happy!'

The next day was the Feast. Some of the guests had arrived the day before, and more and more came all that morning, nobles from all over Thessaly who were friends and owed some sort of allegiance to the Grand Duke, even a few from other states to the south, and one or two not very completely Hellenized chiefs from the hills to the north and west. They all crowded in, stabled or picketed their horses and left their baggage and servants either in the big halls of the castle or else in the tents of striped linen that Thorax had set up in the fields all round. By midday the whole place was ringing with voices and noises, horses trampling and neighing, rattling at harness or chariot poles, men shouting, heaving things about with terrific excitements and comings and goings, hounds baying, fires crackling, wood and metal banged about in a bustling lightness of heart! There were a good many women, wives and

daughters, all in their very best, together in the orchard like a patch of birds or flowers among the pale leaves that were beginning to fall, all talking and laughing too, and calling out to any of their menfolk who passed. Hippokleas saw his own two sisters in the thick of it, flushed and pretty and proud, and supposed that his father and mother would probably take this opportunity of getting their marriages arranged.

And in the house and the open courts at the back, there was an amazing amount of cooking going on. His hunters had brought in piles of beasts to be roasted or boiled for the Grand Duke. They lay in heaps on straw, flayed and trussed to come on in relays during supper. There were steaming stewpots full of lovely mixtures to be poured out with a hot flop on to great golden dishes. There were piles of cakes in baskets to be carried round, and little loaves stuck with almonds and cardamoms and cloves. There were masses of late autumn fruit, apples and pears, grapes, pomegranates and medlars. There were salads and cucumbers, and sharp sauces to go with them, carrots and soaked beans. There were swans, herons and geese, and hundreds of smaller birds. There were huge fishes that would take two men to carry them in, sturgeon and skate and sea-bream, and swelling coils of grey eels. There was honey to dip the bread in, sweets for the boys and women, and saffron or rose-scented water for the guests' hands.

In the feasting hall it was much quieter. The tables and couches were ready, the floor strewn with herbs, the cushions with petals. The wine jars waited, still and enormous, in brilliant polish of black and red, or

banded with rows of fantastic beasts, purple and grey and yellow. The garlands lay under damp leaves in long baskets, ready to be handed round, and the whole place was scented with them already. Between the pillars, curtains were drawn to keep out the heat of the sun.

After midday the noise quieted a little; most of the guests had come and were sleeping for an hour or two after the journey and before the feast. Pindar lay in the cool of his room with Hippokleas beside him; they talked a little, but not much. It was very hot. By and by they got up and washed and put on their clean clothes and combed their hair, and Pindar put the bay wreath straight on to the boy's head. They went out and found Thorax. He was very magnificent, both in looks and dress. His eyes and jewels gleamed with wonderful beauty. He said to Hippokleas: 'This is the best moment in your life. I think it may be in mine too.' He did not say anything to Pindar, but looked at him and nodded.

It seemed a very short time before the whole of that crowd of friends and guests were gathered in the orchard under the trees on the grass slope, facing down to the river. The heat was abating; the sun was low and golden among the tops of the poplars on the far bank. Thorax sat in the middle on folds of a thick purple cloak, Hippokleas at his feet. Pindar sat apart, a little to the left, with his head buried in his arms, suddenly quite certain of terrible and inevitable failure. Behind the guests were hundreds of country people, farmers and labourers, standing or up in the trees. The chorus came in along the river bank and stood with

their backs to the sun, with long bright-coloured cloaks of finely-pleated linen, all different.

For quite a long time Pindar did not really hear what they were singing, only his body was tossed about with painful shocks every time they neared some passage which might be going to go wrong. But after a time he dared to look up. Everyone was listening and quiet. The only one who moved was Thorax, and he looked all about him just once with great pride.

They sang of mortal happiness, all that the gods allow. But then the fairy tune came in, the tune of the people of the north that have this other, this unallowed happiness: 'But neither by ship nor foot, shall you find that marvellous road.' No way, no way!

And Danaä's son went there once, for Athena showed him the path, but he must go on and on, with his back to the marches of fairyland, until he finds the Gorgon and kills her. The fairy tune drooped and died.

Then that song ship swung round quick on a dropped anchor, and the bloom left the story of Perseus and hovered and fell on the beautiful boy Hippokleas. He has won the race at Delphi and I have written this song: when the thing one has ached and striven for is finished, then for a little time the violence of joy catches one and nothing can take it away! And that must go; but no one knows about it – any time in the twelvemonth from now it may be on one again!

Once more the song changed, came down deliciously, quickly, like a child, to all the good things Thorax had ready for everyone. To the solid facts of food and drink and being friends and being together. It ended so in a

great procession of realities, Thorax and Thessaly, the plain truth of good men and wise ruling and happy cities. Suddenly it was all over. And then again Pindar cowered because he did not know, not in the very least, what they would make of it. But it was all right. They came rushing, shouting at him with praise he could hardly bear, so weak and emptied he felt. And Thorax, flushed and glorious, a fact come alive; and behind him Hippokleas, not saying anything but looking it all. And Thrasydaios, delightful creature, as pleased as if it had been his own.

They went into the feast; the curtains were pulled back now and the place filled with shallow level sunlight. But by the time everyone was wreathed and happy and settled down with food and drink, the sun had set and rapidly more and more stars came out over the apple trees and the dark river. They lighted torches and lamps. There was a mixed smell of things to eat and drink, and people, and sweet herbs. Pindar felt so tired he could scarcely keep awake; he did not know what was happening all round him, whether or not Hippokleas had kissed him. He did not know when he went to bed, nor how, but he slept for hours and hours.

When he woke next morning he felt as if he were aching all over, and yet there was no pain anywhere. It was as if every bone of his spirit had been broken and now needed complete rest for recovery. But that seemed the last thing he could have. He had scarcely been awake five minutes, scarcely had taken hold of his lax muscles to turn round in bed, before Hippokleas came bounding in, all a-shine and rippling with com-

pletest health and energy. When he saw how tired Pindar was he tried to tone himself down, to talk low and move gently, but this suppressed life was almost worse. Then Thrasydaios came in to congratulate him, and incidentally, to express great satisfaction at his own cleverness and judgment in having found him; he sat down heavily on the bed, on Pindar's foot in fact. Then it was Thorax himself, with half the court crowding and whispering at the door behind him. How unbearable it all was! Pindar sat up in bed. He said 'I must go home to-day.'

Suddenly everyone stopped talking. 'Why?' said Thorax in complete astonishment. Very rapidly he tried to decide why. 'It's the feast of the Marriage of Semele,' he said.

'But surely that's not at this time of the year even at Thebes?' said Thorax slowly and puzzled.

'Of course it is,' said Pindar, sticking his chin out, 'and I'm to write the song for the procession!'

'Why didn't you tell us before?' asked Thrasydaios.

'Oh,' said Pindar, 'I never do that till the time comes.'

After a little the others went away, leaving Pindar to dress and become rather anxious about his lies: it wasn't, after all, quite decent! But could one go on being a gentleman under that sort of provocation? When he went out he found Hippokleas waiting; as there seemed no very obvious alternative, they walked out of the side of the house and over the fields.

'Why did you say that?' said Hippokleas.

And Pindar said, 'Because I want to go.'

Hippokleas shivered, but said nothing for the moment, then: 'They'll find out.'

'Let them. I'm a poet. Poets are allowed to be liars.'

'But why?' said Hippokleas, catching hard hold of his arm, 'Oh why do you want to go? Don't we love one another?'

'I don't think that's got much to do with it,' said Pindar slowly. 'You see, the thing here's done. You wouldn't have wanted to stay at Delphi after the race, would you?'

'No. But you weren't there.'

'Does it matter so much?'

'Yes.'

Pindar bit his lip and went on again. He felt he was being cruel, but could no more help it than he could help breathing. 'Everything's got to end some time, hasn't it? Unless one can find one's way to that Country of the Young. And shouldn't it be now? Listen, Hippokleas, while I was writing my song you were – you were – oh, the breath of the Muses blew through you to me! I could no more have done without you than without my lyre. And now –' He shook himself and then said, with all the impatience he was feeling, but had been trying, up to then, to hide, 'now the song's written.'

And Hippokleas said, 'I see.'

They walked to the end of the field. Pindar had tears in his eyes now. 'I've been a devil!' said Pindar, 'I am still. Oh my dear – But can't you see? I'm driven by my God, to love where he chooses and stop loving when he chooses.'

'I know,' said Hippokleas very gently, taking the hand away from Pindar's arm, 'I expect you're right to go away now.' But really he did not know at all, he was only surprised and dreadfully hurt and not so grown-up as he had thought he was.

'Oh, you do see!' said Pindar, in his eagerness taking it all for real, 'then it's all right. Forgive me, Hippokleas, and forget me.'

They took one another's hands, and Hippokleas said yes, not daring to say he couldn't do either, at least not yet.

They came back very quiet and close to one another; Hippokleas, with his heart almost breaking, reached out every now and then and touched Pindar's fingers or shoulder; and Pindar, suddenly hating those soft, unhappy touches, yet managed to bear them and smiled at Hippokleas or held his hand tight, partly to comfort him and partly to stop him touching with it. Hybrestas saw them from the far side of the field, so close to one another, and hated the stranger poet and wished he would go soon.

Pindar did not, after all, go till the next day, when all the guests had gone; Thorax would have been too much offended if he had gone sooner. At the last moment he almost thought of refusing to be paid, but not quite. It had been such a good song! Thrasydaios was to ride with him to the southern bounds of Thessaly; beyond that, he and his servant must make their own way to Thebes and trust not to be robbed. He said good-bye to Hippokleas first, in his own room. 'In a week,' he said, 'it will be all over, like a dream,

like the empty air of a place where songs have been sung and will be again! Oh Hippokleas, you'll be thinking of your next race. I know.' But Hippokleas was dreadfully dumb and white.

Thorax said good-bye at the castle gate, magnificent as ever. Again Pindar found himself admiring him for being so thorough, so true, so much what people ought to be like. A few miles on they passed a herd of the Grand Duke's horses jostling together in a patch of shade under a plane tree. A big colt suddenly bounded out from among them, and went galloping round in a great circle, with its lovely, live head and swinging, tossing mane and tail. 'And that's what a horse ought to be like too!' said Pindar to Thrasydaios. But Thrasydaios thought this was rather silly, because he had noticed that the colt was far too straight-shouldered and was just thinking that he would never be able to make a racer out of it. Only, Pindar had never in his life seen so many horses as he had these twelve days in Thessaly.

But, after all, it was not quite a week. For three days clouds gathered, seemed as if they must burst, dispersed, and gathered again thicker and blacker. Lightning rippled all night above the hills. Hippokleas was glad that the sky had become the echo of his heart. He walked in the heat under the thunder clouds as though he had made them, and watched the plane and willow leaves loosen in the wind and blow away.

Then it broke in one day of violent storms and cold. As usual, no one was prepared for it and the chimneys smoked and Thorax sat and laughed. That night there

was the half-forgotten annoying feel of blankets again for everybody; but Hippokleas slept without dreaming. The morning was still clouded but more thinly: for the moment it had rained itself out. The river Peneios was a good deal higher already, swollen partly with rain water, partly with mud and leaves and sticks. Hippokleas nodded at it and walked up stream. All the dry cracks in the plain had come alive, were trickling greedily with brown flood water. Every year he forgot what the end of summer was till it came. In a few days there would be sun and heat again and the floods would soak away and the rivers go to sleep for a little longer, but the young grass and the fat green seedlings would have woken up and the horses would begin to get the winter polish on their coats. And Hippokleas stuck his arms into one of the new little rivers and felt the cold determined rush and bump of water and pebbles against his skin.

By and by Hybrestas came along in a sheepskin coat, with his bow and arrows. 'Where are you going?' said Hippokleas.

'There's an otter,' said Hybrestas, 'under the Split-Acre tree; I saw it. Will you come?'

That sore lump of memory pounded again at his heart and checked his answer. 'I don't think I want to,' he said at last, looking down at the water and his muddy hands.

Hybrestas stood and said, 'I do wish you would,' and kicked a stone about. A kingfisher passed close to them and plunged into the main stream. 'It was a big dog-otter, such a beauty!' he said.

'You'll have lost it by now,' said Hippokleas.

'But there are heaps of tracks to-day.'

'I suppose we'd better look. There may be one or two flooded out.'

'Oh yes!' said Hybrestas, 'come on, we can cut across by the other path – '

For a minute they trotted on, saying nothing and getting thoroughly splashed with mud. The tree came in sight. They went cautiously.

'Oh, look,' whispered Hybrestas, 'there he is!'

'Yes,' said Hippokleas, 'but it's not yours – it's a young one.' There was a new desire in his mind that he hadn't had for a long time. He hesitated and then let go to it. 'Hybrestas,' he said, 'lend me your bow! Mine's at home – and – and you know I'm a better shot than you and we must get him!'

'There you are!' said Hybrestas, grinning a little, 'if you haven't forgotten how! Quick, he'll see us – oh, good shot, Hippokleas!'

*

But it seems that it was more than a twelvemonth before the God came again to Pindar. We know nothing of him until eight years later in the spring, when he wrote a pæan for the Delphians. By that time the alliance between Sparta and Thessaly had broken, and Thorax of Larissa with his brothers was going over to the Medes. Most likely some of the nobles of Thessaly went with him, but not others. At any rate, he was on the wrong side at Thermopylæ. Hippokleas won again at Delphi, in the men's race, when he was twenty-five. But Pindar did not write for him again.

PEACE

I will believe you now:
Believe not only
Words you have never spoken,
Unheard, perhaps unwanted,
And so, not losses:

But also (if the how
And why are sought for)
Eyes that have watched me softly,
That try, I think, to show me
Some sweet unfolding.

Shy mind, dear hands un-fleet
This crown to weave me!
Yet, sure, I see you clearly,
Endure chill time that lingers,
And wait its finish.

Now at late last is sweet
What long was bitter,
Now, now can love be written,
Allowed to break from silence,
And look, unblinded!

THE LAMB MISUSED

All along, on three sides of the courtyard, there was a trellis of poles, with vines and runner beans and briar roses climbing up it, shading the low rooms behind. On the fourth side the town wall of Ithome went sheer up, twenty-feet high and five feet thick, great blocks of limestone, roughly squared, strengthened, just here, with tarred oak beams, their butt ends well bedded in the hard earth of the yard. When there was an attack and arrows or sling-stones came flying over, Moscha and the baby stayed in shelter, with the two maids, and all the beasts, and Arné, till it was over. Then they came out again and picked up the sling-stones and pulled the arrows out of the trellis, and ran off to the neighbours to chatter about it. But that didn't happen often; the Spartans were bad at besieging, and, as usual they had their neighbours to fight – on and off – as well as their own rebels: and Ithome on the peaks was a difficult place to deal with. The siege had been going on now for three years; all that time Moscha and the baby had never been outside the walls, though her husband was often down on the plain, raiding, and always came back safe and defiant as ever. He was a Messenian of the old stock: there was a story of some remote grandfather who might have been at Ira with

Aristomenes in the days when Messene was still a nation; all these generations of slavery had not quite quenched the old fire. Moscha was a helot girl he had married, more or less, before the rising; but she had at least had the courage to follow him to Ithome, and there, after a little, she got her reward: a real house, with beds and chests and crockery and everything to be mistress of, two maids, and a boy-baby, and unlimited chances of abusing the Spartans.

Now it was about midday, and the sun bright and hot: the yard smelt of roses and onions and goats and cooking. In one corner, under the shade of the trellis, there was a heap of straw; on it, a hound-bitch suckling puppies, the three newest kids, little and fluffy, a sitting hen, and two Spartan prisoners. One of them still lay just as he had been tumbled there half an hour before, all in a twisted heap, his horrible moaning breath frothing his open mouth and stiff lips, his head and face messed over with caked blood and dirt, and an oozing cut across the back of his right hand that showed the bones. His friend spoke to him again, urgently, 'Melyllias! Oh, you mustn't die!' Then, still getting no answer or sign, sat up miserably, nursing his own wounded arm; his feet were chained to a trellis pole and he kept on shuffling them in the straw.

Then Moscha came out of the house, plump and pretty in her spotted red dress, with the baby on one arm, and after them her husband, Alkis, pulling at a strap on his breastplate. 'Man!' said the baby, pointing. 'Man!'

'Yes, my duckie,' said Moscha, dancing him. 'Nasty man – chained up!'

She spat accurately at the prisoner, who looked up, with 'Water!' – then, harshly: 'He's dying.'

'Dying! Shamming, I call it!' said Moscha, and kicked the other Spartan: but still he did not open his eyes.

Alkis laughed and, kneeling down, began probing the head wounds with a straw: 'Melyllias, isn't he? – the King's friend. Bit of luck for me!' Then he stood up and wiped his hands with a rag that was stuck in the trellis: 'Get him washed and look sharp,' he said.

But Moscha gave a little squeal: 'Not me! I'm a lady – I am!'

Alkis pinched her cheek pretty sharply: 'Make your sister then – I don't care – but it's got to be done, my girl: see? And food and drink, too – show they're not starving us!' Then, kindly enough to the prisoner, 'And you – what's your name?'

'Well – Telestas. Is he going to live?'

'Of course he is: think I'm going to lose a catch like that! Here: you aren't a true Spartan?'

The man shrugged his shoulders: 'No. But I'm his half-brother, anyway.'

'And fighting your mother's people: what a damn little fool you are!' Alkis went swaggering into the house with the feeling he sometimes got that Ithome, up here, was the top of the world, and he was part of it.

'Here, you, Arné!' screamed Moscha, out of the yard. 'Drop that washing, can't you, and come when you're called! Don't keep me waiting all day.' Arné,

her sister, ran out bare-foot, her dress pulled knee-high and splashed with water, pushing her hair out of her eyes with damp hands. She was a small dark-eyed thing, not full-grown, with a pleasant way of grinning at people as if she hoped she'd done what they liked. 'I can't do everything, can I?' she said, complaining; 'there's that shield of his not half shiny yet, and you know he'll bite my head off if it's not right! Oh, and if that isn't baby after those chicks again!'

She gave Telestas a bowl of porridge and milk to get on with while she washed his friend's wounds carefully with clean water and pads of hay. By and by, Melyllias groaned more consciously and opened his blue eyes, and stared at her, not yet aware enough to question anything. She washed and cut most of the tangles out of his long hair, smoothing it out, yellower and finer than the light oat-straw. For a moment he held on to her hand vaguely, but she shook him off, flushing, and felt about in his mouth for broken teeth. He was sick twice and then seemed better; his face firmed up and took on good lines of health again. She unpinned one of his shoulder-brooches to get at a wound in his neck; if the other hadn't been looking on she'd have taken his tunic right off; now she went on roughly pulling him about and throwing the dirty water with a splash into the middle of the yard. How they used to stride about in the old days, those fair, tall, curly-headed masters of hers, never a glance to throw at a little helot girl herding pigs! And she, wandering about in the woods, shaking down mast for the grunting, guzzling sows, and all the time dreaming – suppose one of them was to notice her.

. . . And now she'd got him in her hands to do what she liked with, touch all over, forehead and lips and beautiful long fingers. She chewed up burnet leaves to put on the wounds, tied them with clean rags, and gave him another drink, then turned sharply on Telestas and snatched away the empty porridge bowl. Ugly thing, she thought, taking after your mother! He was as dark as she was, with a bit of a black stubby beard, and brown eyes, but as strong as a horse, not saying a word when she'd got his wounded arm.

At the end he thanked her, smiling, and asked what her name was. 'None of your business!' she snapped back at him. Then, going off, she tugged at the chains on his feet, partly to see that they were firm, partly because she knew that they were rough at the edge and would hurt him.

In a day or two Melyllias was better, well enough to go dumb sullen with shame at being taken prisoner by these revolting slaves, in spite of all Telestas could say. He remembered nothing after the blow on his head, and he did not know his half-brother had been wounded defending him. He kept on fretting and wondering if the King would ever have him again as a friend. He knew they would ask a heavy ransom for him, or use him for bargaining, and he hated them all, and let Telestas answer for him when Alkis questioned them. At the end of the week he was still dizzy if he tried to stand up, and the wound on his hand was not healing well.

He did not try and look about him at all, but by that time Telestas did. There had been a busy day for the

household; Moscha had taken it into her head that the weaving must be finished at once, so everyone was put on to it. Moscha thought herself very clever at it but somehow the cloth never came out really smooth, so of course, as she was the mistress, all the blame had to be put on the others, most of all Arné who never could learn to be a lady, not if she lived to be a hundred, always thinking of her old pigs, wasn't she, better get back to them – lazy, worthless little hussy, not fit to live in a free town, eating her kind sister out of house and home! Here one of the maids suggested it was a good bleaching day, and Arné crept out, sniffling like a little puppy, but taking care not to cry over the bundle of new cloth. She strewed hay for it to lie on, and then spread it out in the sun with corners weighted, and wished she could answer back properly at that sister of hers, only she knew Alkis didn't think much of her and it would be awful to be turned out after all – she'd had Ithome and the rising well drummed into her – and have to go back and be a slave: not that it wasn't nicer sometimes in the woods. . . .

'They've been going for that kid again,' said Telestas, low, lying on his face and watching her.

Melyllias looked round for a moment, then let his head fall back on to his hand: 'Well?'

Telestas moved a little closer: 'It's my belief she'd do anything for you.'

'Me – why?'

'The way she looks. Haven't you seen her yourself – when she brings you things? No, you haven't. But – well, think of her back in the old days: you must be half

a god to her. Just as you've always been to me – a bit – ever since the Class.'

Melyllias shook his head impatiently: 'You say so.'

'Well, if – Father – hadn't got me chosen when I was little and put me in the Class, with you – then I think – I'm nearly sure – I'd have been on their side, hating you all.'

'These rebels! Nonsense.'

But after a minute or two Telestas went on again. 'You see, never even catching sight of my mother again, I forgot all that, and then, because I was older than you, I could watch you growing up to what you are now. But this girl came on you suddenly; I could see it happen.'

'Oh, you talk too much. You always have.'

'I'm sorry,' said Telestas, 'do I make your head ache?'

Neither spoke again for a time. Arné went back for a second bundle of stuff from the house. The pigeons flew down from the roof and began fidgeting about the yard after corn, the cock bird every now and then cooing loudly and hoarsely as he swaggered with his pink legs after the hens. A sentry walked along the town wall above their heads, singing a cheerful, rapid, un-Spartan song, and throwing and catching his light spear as if he were mocking someone on the other side. At last Melyllias looked up: 'You mean, she might help us?'

'That's in your hands.'

'But you don't expect me to go making love to that wire-haired little scrub of a helot?'

Telestas looked at the ground uncomfortably; he had often wondered what his own mother had been like. Then he said: 'I'm no use.'

'You're not bad to look at: good enough for her, anyway!'

'When you're by I'm just a crow, as you know, Melyllias. You wouldn't have to do much – a look and a word to start with: try!'

Arné came out of the house with her arms full of cloth, her face twitching and flushed; Moscha's temper was still as bad as ever – the rest of them wondered if it wasn't another baby coming. Melyllias got slowly to his feet, steadied himself a moment with one hand on the trellis pole, the other at his head, went over, and began putting stones on to the corners of the piece that was laid out. 'Oh,' said Arné, 'you're doing it all wrong!' Then, with a little catch in her breath, 'Besides, you aren't strong enough. Go back!' She ran up to him, pushing him gently to the straw-heap; he was too weak to do anything but go, and again caught at the pole to keep himself from falling. 'Why did you want to help me?' she asked, looking up at his face, the thick curls low on his forehead, the firm, heavy lips. She looked to him silly and coarse-skinned, but her eyes were rather like some nice beast that one plays with and caresses. For answer he kissed her, and then sat down again, and began burrowing with his fingers among the straw.

Arné knelt over her bundle, shaking madly with tears and laughter together, biting her fingers to try and stop herself. He had loved her all the time! She'd be

scolded again for being so slow: it didn't matter. She daren't face round and see him yet; her hair coming unsnooded. One of the maids – 'Come and help me with this, do! No, it's nothing. I – I tripped over a bit of rope and twisted my foot. Really it's all right – don't tell, there's a dear!'

'Was that your way?' whispered Melyllias.

'Fine. Was it so bad, after all?'

'Garlicky. But she's tinder to it; you're right.'

'I was thinking: you'd best not seem to be getting on too well, or you'll be chained too. I suppose she can get me a file. All we'll want then is a cloudy night and a ladder and three black cloaks.'

'We'll not have to take her with us?'

'Of course we shall. Why else do you think she'll help us? Besides, if we left her here – poor kid!'

'Yes, but what can we do with her – afterwards?'

'Oh, wait till the time comes, Melyllias. All we want now is to get out.'

Melyllias nodded. If he escaped cleverly there'd be no harm done, no one would think the worse of him, surely not the King. Already he was getting childishly homesick for his own deep green valley, the noise of Eurotas running between poplars, and the long street of Sparta.

The next day Arné brought their breakfast early, saying very little, and then flitted off, and they saw no more of her till evening. She took two of the pigeons in a basket, pulled a scarf over her hair, and ran out of the house before her sister noticed. She hurried across the town, not stopping to talk to her friends at the well-

head or call up to any high window, and by and by she came to the House that belonged to the Dark Aphrodite of Ithome, and knocked on the door.

The pigeon's blood was up to the rim of the bowl; the strewn myrtle leaves made patterns round it. Dark Aphrodite had a dress of scarlet wool, embroidered all over with little dancing people and animals in white and black. She had a gold crown and ear-rings, her hair was painted red and her eyes blue. She was very old – older than Ithome – polished and glowing with age and much worship. You looked at her for a long time and made your vows, and perhaps, after you had waited, you would get a sign.

Alkis and a friend were having supper that evening, with the two women waiting on them and eating scraps themselves between times. There were not many flowers in Ithome, but Alkis, of course, insisted on garlands, so Arné had strung oak leaves together and tied them up with knots of coloured thread and a couple of roses in front. They weren't very good, though. She kept on remembering that other golden head, outside, and thought she could make something better for him, if she had the chance.

Moscha, for a wonder, was quite pleased with life; she had a new dress with coloured borders and a string of blue pottery beads – foreign, they were, she thought proudly – that Alkis had given her the last time he had been down raiding. She picked a chicken bone her husband hadn't half finished, dipping it well in the sauce, with a lump of new bread and some beans soaked in vinegar, then seized on the sheep's hearts Arné was

dishing up, and carried them in. Quite a banquet it was, she thought, and blushed with pleasure when Alkis patted her arm and praised her for a good little wife, and hoped he wouldn't get the gripes from all that stuffing, but he wasn't going to leave a bit over anyway, and then gave her a sip of his wine before he started talking to his friend again. As she went out, she looked at them lying there on lovely down cushions, talking so fine about freedom and all, and thought the King of Sparta himself didn't make a better show than her husband! She let Arné take in the salad while she stirred round the crock with their next dish, a nice fat stew of ground-nuts in butter with mint and parsley and coriander and an egg to break over it all the last thing – no black broth at Ithome! Like a lot of helot women she was a good natural cook, and only wished they could possibly have a cow instead of the goats.

When Arné came in the men were talking about the two prisoners. Telestas was to be ransomed in bar iron, for they were short of metal, and a letter was being sent off to King Archidamos saying that Melyllias would be killed unless they got back twelve of their own men who had been caught the week before and who were in some danger, as the Spartans were apt to throw their rebel prisoners over the nearest precipice. Arné shuddered, thinking of Melyllias with his dear head bent back for the knife: suppose the King didn't send their twelve! And then suppose he did, and Melyllias went away and she never saw him again, never got kissed again – oh Aphrodite, Lady, be kind to the poor girl who brought you pigeons this morning!

Alkis and his friend left nearly half of that lovely stew, but Arné saved her bit to take out to the yard later on. And then he wouldn't eat it after all! It was dreadful not to be able to give one's man the food he liked. But still, it was a dark night and she could kneel down a minute beside him in the straw, and cuddle against him with her young breasts, and get another kiss before she went in, enough to sleep on.

Next morning Alkis told the Spartans the message he was sending to King Archidamos. As usual, Melyllias said nothing and Telestas very little. That was annoying for Alkis, because naturally he would have liked a pleasant little conversation, with the Spartans telling him that at last they realized that the Gods had spoken and Messene must be free and equal with men like their host ruling her: and he himself being very magnanimous and talking about his ancestors and the shade of Aristomenes, and ending up on the brotherhood of the Dorians, and the Sacred Games, and how he was going to enter for the chariot race at Olympia as soon as Messenians were admitted again. But instead, they treated him quite civilly, but as if he wasn't a person at all! Well, what was the good of being master! He explained to Melyllias exactly how he was going to be killed and how long it would take, and then asked him if he had anything to add to the message to the King. But Melyllias only looked bored. 'Thanks, nothing,' he said, and Alkis went off furious, and ran into Arné who had been listening, and knocked her against the wall. It's all these women dangling about, he thought, no one can tell I'm a Dorian too!

Arné crouched against the wall till he was by, feeling her bruised shoulder, so sore. Then she went straight out, blindly, to the one sure comfort. Moscha was off gossiping with a neighbour, the baby with her; the maids were busy. Even the goats were lying drowsily in the shade.

'Arné,' he said, 'little lamb,' taking her brown, broken-nailed hands in his, and smiled at her.

'Oh,' she said, 'oh, I heard what he said to you! It will be all right, won't it?' And flopped herself down like any small beast with her head against his knee.

The two men looked at each other. Finally, it was Telestas who spoke, gravely: 'Arné, I think he will get that death.' He frowned at his half-brother, who at last took it up with a real reluctance that made it all the more convincing:

'Men have suffered worse. But it won't be an easy death.' He was almost certain that even if Archidamos would not exchange him for those particular prisoners, he was yet too important to be just killed. Still, one never knew with these rebels – they might get angry. And, anyhow, the child was swallowing it all so well – too easy game to leave with escape at the end! All the same, he found himself fondling her hair and neck with a gentle hand, and her bare arms were warm and pleasant against his bare legs.

She looked up and whispered, 'I want to help you,' and then they told her, quickly and simply, what they wanted.

'And me?' she said, looking up at Melyllias.

'You're my sweetheart, aren't you?' he answered, and

kissed her again, all soft and willing, pressing the little she-thing up against him more and more pleasantly. Suddenly she jumped up, startled by some noise, and ran away.

He looked after her. Then, shrugging his shoulders at Telestas: 'But what am I to do with her afterwards?'

Two days later there was still no message back from the King; but that might be accounted for several ways: they were rough paths to Ithome, and early that morning a heavy thunderstorm had broken over the mountains so that every hollow was streaming. The storm was not yet over; thunder kept growling about the peaks and the sky was heavy with clouds; also, it was almost new moon. Telestas had rather a stiff elbow, but nothing impossible, and Melyllias was better than he made out to Alkis and Moscha; he would be able to do it.

There were three black cloaks hidden under Arné's mattress: she could get the ladder down from the rafters of the byre where it was kept; everything seemed clear. She went out, pale as dry leaves, and hurried across Ithome, breaking into little uneven runs, till she came again to the house of Dark Aphrodite. She whispered a long time with the priestess, who brought out at last a white cloth, and chisel, and hammer. The priestess was a youngish woman with a strong, narrow face and deep eyes; she lighted something on a patterned dish that smoked heavily, and prayed to the Goddess with the palms of her hands held flat out, white in the smoke. Then she took the chisel in her left hand and the hammer in her right. and cut off the

top joint of Arné's little finger and bound it up again with the new cloth. Then Arné went away, satisfied with the blood and the pain; surely this would be taken! At the smithy Dark Aphrodite began to help her, because the smith did not hesitate to lend her the tools that she said were for Alkis, but that really were to loose Telestas quietly from his chains. And just as easily she borrowed the knotted rope from a neighbour, making up her story so well that it was almost true.

She knew as she went from street to street that this was most likely the last she would see of the high town that had been her home for three years. But she cared hardly at all; Ithome was so much less real than her lover whom she was saving from death. She knew in her head that she would never go to the well again in the early morning, chattering and playing knuckle-bones with her friends till her turn came for the bucket; but her heart seemed unaware of any loss. It had given itself up so wholly to the golden-headed Spartan.

She kept out of the way as much as she could, and her sister never noticed the finger. Alkis was angry at not getting his answer yet from the King, so Moscha got him off to bed early, to soothe him down, and left Arné to tuck up the baby for the night and to see that all the shutters were bolted. As she went in, the baby grinned at her sleepily and patted her face with a fat, damp hand; she kissed round his neck till he was squirming with laughter, and then tucked the blanket under and set the cradle rocking, and thought, wide-eyed, of sons that she would bear to Melyllias.

It was dark by now and everyone asleep. She

brought the tools and helped Telestas to get the links of his chain apart. Melyllias asked her in a whisper what had happened to her finger, and she told him. At the last moment she ran back to the house and put on her silver necklace. 'How eager she is on it!' said Telestas. 'Queer birds, women in love. Giving up her town as easy as a sheep its wool!'

'She's a slave,' said Melyllias, low; 'it's not natural for her to be free.'

'Maybe,' said Telestas, twisting his belt over the tools to keep them there for weapons if he needed them later. 'But she's been quick at finding a master!'

The sentry passed on the wall above them; again there was thunder and a few heavy raindrops. She and Telestas got out the ladder and put it against the wall very quietly. Melyllias and she climbed and made the rope fast. Telestas laid the ladder down again, so that the sentry passing the next time would not see it, and swarmed up the rope. Then it was thrown over at the other side. The men climbed down, bade her throw down the rope, because it would surely be seen by the sentry, and jump herself. It occurred to Telestas that the best way out of their difficulties might be to let the girl jump and kill herself – a good, quick death – but the height was not enough to make it sure, and if she only hurt herself she would be sure to scream; so he held one edge of the cloak and Melyllias the other. It was so dark they could scarcely see the top of the wall.

Arné threw down the rope and then went suddenly sick at the drop. She stayed trembling up on the wall, and her love was not enough to call her through all those

empty feet of air. But there was no choice: only to be found on the wall by the sentries and dragged back – at the thought of that she shut her eyes and jumped, and they caught her, and she managed not to scream.

Then it was hours of stumbling and hiding among the black rocks, drenching in sudden, angry rain torrents, pushing through thick tangles of thorn and prickly oak and wild pear, and always going down, down, with the dawn growing mercifully at last over heights to the left, and the plain spreading and gleaming below them, wet and green. By this time Arné was bruised and aching all over; her finger was bleeding again and smarted like fire every time she touched anything with it; whenever they stopped for a minute she was sobbing under her breath. Like her, the men were bruised and cut about the knees and elbows, and Melyllias for all his training was too tired to stand straight. They found an overhanging rock with bushes in front of it and dry grass and leaves under it, and threw themselves down and slept.

Telestas woke first, stiff and anxious and happy. The storm had passed and the bushes were full of sunlight. The others were still asleep, their damp hair sticking to their cheeks and foreheads. He woke Melyllias with a soft touch and whisper, and then went off quietly to look about him, through the dripping, shining bushes. It was getting warmer every minute; a lizard crept cautiously out on to a piece of dried stone and lay throbbing with his eyes turned up to the sun.

Arné had been so tired it took her a little time to wake fully; she was lying on her back with her hands in

the rustling leaves. Still half asleep, she felt the warmth of another body along her own, and yielded and melted into submission, all her flesh tense and aching with a new pleasure; then, waking more fully, blinked up into his blue eyes and knew what was being done to her, and clutched him tighter with trembling hands. Afterwards she whimpered a little, and went away till she found a pool where she could wash; when she came back the two men were talking and she had to sit by till they were finished.

By and by they started off again, cautiously; she wished Telestas would go on ahead and leave her alone with the other whose woman she was now. They helped her across a stream and Melyllias kissed her again and laid his hand on her breast. She was grateful for that. Soon they got down into more cultivated country, passing softly by a sheep pasture or a patch of corn, or sometimes a little farm. Once they sent Arné on ahead to ask the way, and she found out that the main body of the Spartans under King Archidamos was quite close. The people were too frightened not to be friendly, and Melyllias said he would rest at the farm while Telestas pushed on. His head was aching badly, but if he stayed till the cool of the evening it would get better.

The farm people, well in awe of Sparta, brought milk and cheese and bread and what early fruit they had; then they tiptoed out and left Melyllias and Arné alone in the big living-room with the straw mattresses covered with cow-hide at one end, and the rafters dangling onions and salt-fish over their heads. Arné sat on the floor looking up at him and rubbing her chin

against his thigh. He stroked her neck and smiled at her, wondering through his headache whether Telestas would be in time to stop the King sending back any message. She wanted him to talk a little about the waking that morning; but knew he was very tired, and only began a gentle kissing of his wounded hand.

All at once he roused himself and started thanking her; she listened quietly, loving every moment of it. At last she said: 'And now – you're going to take me back to Sparta, to your mother's house – aren't you?'

He answered evasively: 'It fell down in the earthquake.' Then, 'She was killed in it.'

'Oh, I'm sorry!' said Arné, drooping her lip, and at once, of course, felt all warm and motherly to him, sure she could more than replace the dead woman.

'I think,' he said, 'you'd better stay here for now. I'll speak to the housewife about it. Then I can come and see you.'

She looked round, pleased with the place just because it was his choice. There was honeysuckle and a flower she called 'white fingers' with sweet, waxy blossoms, climbing up the doorposts; she could make lovely crowns for him when he came, better than ever she'd made Alkis! He drew her up close to him on the mattress and kissed her face and neck, touching her all over, liking to feel her clinging so softly and sweetly against him.

Suddenly, at a sound from outside, he let her go, and then jumped to his feet. 'Oh,' he said, 'the King!' Three or four Spartans in scarlet cloaks and fine armour came in, Telestas behind them. King Archi-

damos came over and kissed Melyllias, saying he was very welcome back, 'to the army and to me. Clever fox you are,' he went on, grinning out of his thick, curly beard, 'I knew you'd get out of the trap. I always told them so.' He nodded at the others. 'But I like knowing I'm right. Just in time, too! They said I shouldn't, but all the same I was going to send back those twelve rebels.'

'But you didn't?'

'Not me. And they won't get another chance with their heads off!'

'Then it's all like it was before?' said Melyllias.

The King put an arm round his shoulder:

'Surely. I've got a horse for you. Come on, my heart.'

It was two days before Melyllias came back to the farm for an hour. Arné threw herself on to him, sobbing with pleasure, burying her nose in him, feeling every dear bit of his flesh, kissing his feet, covering him with flowers. After that he would come most nights for a little, tethering his horse at the door till he had finished with her, and then riding back the familiar starry way to sleep among his companions. Once or twice he brought her presents, and he gave the farm people money; during the day Arné used to help them make cheese, pluck hens, dig roots, or milk the goats and the one cow; but she didn't like going very far afield in case he came for her. As he liked it, she used to wash herself every day and comb her hair and sometimes have clean linen. Her finger was quite healed but not pretty to look at; still, it would stop any God being jealous of her

happiness. Every now and then she'd ask him what was going to happen by and by, but he was apt to put her off or kiss the questions out of her mouth; but she knew it would be all right somehow; Aphrodite would care for her.

Melyllias was wondering very much what he could do with her; this was not going to last for ever. He liked the child for an hour's play, but even so, he was getting sick of some of the little things she was sure to say or do every time he came. He talked to his half-brother, but Telestas shrugged his shoulders and said, 'It's better than being in Ithome, anyway!'

'All the same, we must be grateful,' said Melyllias, frowning; 'she saved us. She can't go unrewarded.'

'Give her a cow and marry her off to someone.'

Melyllias nodded and thought it over.

The next day he spoke to Telestas again: 'You're right about Arné. I'll give her a dozen cows and twenty sheep or anything you like, and then you can marry her yourself.'

Telestas stood and clenched his fists; he could hardly speak. 'Fine present your leavings make! I didn't stand over you and keep them off when you were wounded for a handful of muck in my face now! By the Twin Gods, you take that back or I'll kill you!'

Melyllias stared back at him, his hands on his hips, furious that it hadn't worked: 'What's the matter? You've no call to say that about the girl, black-beard! I've treated you as my true brother – but none of us would let you marry his sister!'

Telestas had loved his step-brother for too many years

to try and smash his face in now, as he wanted to; besides, he knew it was half true, and just stayed, sobbing with shame and anger, while Melyllias went on, 'It was you that made the plan; if you don't want her yourself, find someone that does!'

But it was the King who finally settled everything, as he often did. He asked Melyllias one day what he was going to do with the girl, and then said: 'I've a man working my farm now; he stayed loyal when the rest of those dirty dogs ran away to the rebels after the earthquake; I've given him some gear of his own, and he's sure to make a nice penny out of what I don't get from the farm. I'll have him up here and marry them.'

'What sort of man is he?' asked Melyllias, faintly uncomfortable.

'Oh, not so bad for a slave. Why he's a bit like your Telestas as far as looks go. It's a good farm up past Amyclæ, fine pasture and fruit trees. The girl now – is she with child?'

'I don't think so. She's young for that.'

'Good,' said the King, 'then I'll send off for my man.'

That night Melyllias went to the farm as usual, half meaning to tell her, but didn't. He brought her a fine string of beads and was very gentle to her, sorry, now, that it was the last time. She was asleep when he left her, soft and smiling with her hair loose and arms stretched towards him; he covered her over and beckoned the farm-wife to talk to him. Then he mounted and trotted off, free again from any doings with the helots. He wished now that he had not

quarrelled with Telestas, and thought how to make it up, and said to himself that was the worst of women.

Two days later the girls at the farm were all exclaiming over a dress that had been brought for Arné, a white dress embroidered all over with tiny coloured trees. 'A wedding dress,' said the old wife, and they all cried out and began kissing Arné and wishing her luck and bringing her little presents. Her guide to the camp was an old slave who grunted at her and would not answer questions, but her heart was singing too much to care. The great day had come at last, thanks to the Lady of Ithome, her dress was too beautiful, she wore all the beads and bracelets he had given her: what would those proud, whey-faced maypoles of Spartan girls say to her now!

A couple of women she did not know were waiting to put on her veil and garland; they were kind and friendly and laughing. Then, as the custom was, in rushed all the young men, shouting and waving sticks, to carry her off to the bridegroom's house. They ran with her to one of the soldier's huts; the door was hung round with flowers, and she pretended to be frightened though really she was so happy. It was Telestas who carried her over the threshold, and she felt now she must surely like him after that. Inside, through the door, her husband would be waiting to take her, his own bride!

She found herself standing face to face with a strange man, and looked round for Melyllias. And saw Telestas grinning at her queerly, and the rest of the groomsmen all round her. wedging her in. 'Where is he?' she

cried, a little sharply, and Telestas pointed to the stranger:

'There.'

She lifted her hands to her head, her fingers closed tearing on the garland: 'But it isn't him!'

Telestas took her tight by the arm: 'You didn't think a Spartan would marry you, little slut! Take what you get and be thankful!' Then, as she stood gasping, and the stranger came nearer, he and the rest of the men poured out of the hut and slammed the door, and left her alone with her husband.

Telestas ran away from the others and threw himself on the ground, hoping he'd hurt her, as he meant to, hoping she was going on still being hurt, this hateful woman thing that had made Melyllias be so cruel to him!

About noon the next day, the helot set off back to his farm, taking his wife with him in a mule-cart. She did not speak much. As they went through the camp she looked out, but there was no sign of the one she was looking for. After that she kept on peering round at the man: it was his children she was going to bear. She wondered what the King's farm was like; he talked about it a great deal and what he was going to do with the stock she had brought him as dowry. 'Yes,' she would say, 'yes, husband,' and bowed her head. Somewhere up in the hills was Ithome where slaves were free; she had lived there once.

'A WOOD NEAR ATHENS'

We have come a long way, out of Thrace, out of woods
bare and northern
That reach sharp twigs to grey skies and pale storm-
clouds.
There the whole land grieves, weeping over a half
year's winter,
While the dead and sodden leaves crush thickly
underfoot and mingle,
Ash, oak, beech and thorn, all rotted from forgotten
May-times,
While their stripped, forlorn, cold boughs shiver in a
chill daylight.

My friend and I were sad, in the rain there, thinking
of other
Days running in woods we have had, in a bright and
southern
Winter, among trees not all bare, in the dry grass a
few small blossoms.
So we set out from there, on a long road, many moun-
tains crossing.

By sea-grey bays we rode, harsh plains and hill-sides
whinny,
So after many days we came, and it was still winter,

To a pass in the hills we know, and ever behind us
The thin driven snow tossed on the frost-hard road unkindly.
But ahead it cleared and cleared, to our horses' steady pacing
And the wind veered and we felt warm sun on our hands and faces.
At a turn we saw again, and tears in our eyes began to gather,
The lovely plain, and the soft light, and at the end Athens!

For the first hour it was like the north, bare oaks, bare fruit trees,
Scarcely a flower to see, and yet we knew, we remembered beauty.
And then at the side of a hill, by a white farm, in a sunny and terraced hollow,
Lovely and still, at last, oh at last the olives!

They are strong and tender and old, like mothers, wise cradle guardians,
Rocks and winds hold tough roots, grey trunks, tense boughs hardened
And toughened year by year, by many and fruitful harvests twisted:
But the olives are dear too, and leafy, kinder than dearest sisters.
One sees them from the road, above one, in gentle and ordered ranges,
Upright in the well-hoed red earth, with their soft, unchanging,

Grey-green, beautiful shapes. But we could not rhyme
them nor speak them,
For the true word escapes, between image and mind
always creeping . . .
So we came home, we two, and no more, peace or war,
fighting or trading,
Will we roam, but staying here, praise Her, the olive-
giver, our own Maiden.

And then he stopped thinking about Strepsiades and Orseas who had been killed at Oinophyta, and about the boy Aioladas who had been taken prisoner there and died before he could be ransomed, and he stopped thinking about his friends at Aegina and what might be happening to them now, and he stopped hating the Athenians. He forced his thought up from there, up into the square, white room with the couch and the two painted chests and the things in it whose lines he could follow, hunting spears and jars and book-rolls and leather cushions with fringes, intricate enough to keep his eyes on them while he could put those dark things into the back of his memory. To wait there – to wait and come out on him later; but not now. Because there was beauty still – or was there? He looked past the curtain in the doorway to sun and silence and green leaves in the courtyard of his father's house in Thebes. But still it brought no touch of warmth to his heart, no beginnings of that lovely fullness, that swirling and swelling of the mind before the words break out in order and loveliness. The leaves simply stood there, by themselves, green and fixed and shining, refusing to remind him of any happy woods where, in spring, kentaurs bounded: only of other stiff trees, now in the

past heavy and stuck, by paths where he had walked with dead friends.

He brought his eyes back to the room and stood up rather slowly. He was more than sixty years old and when the God did not choose to come there was no forcing Him. And in the times between he was unhappy as he never used to be as a young man. Why, he thought, why? Was it just all this business of the accumulation of evils and sorrows that seemed to be the one inevitable thing in life? Why must they weigh so heavy and the joys so light? He began to think back, feeling for the joy he had known, carefully at first, trying to remember only things that would not hurt him by linking on to present pain. Not feast days, not friendship, not anything shared, now that it made him so sore to remember the sharers. But single things: the sight of the sea suddenly over the edge of a cliff and between dark flat pine boughs that split it into sheets of glitter – and all the hunt had gone by and he had stayed there looking – or those fifty girls at Corinth, so young, so soft and laughing, lifting their lovely arms one by one over the altar, and the clear gums had dripped off their fingers sizzling into the flame, and he had not really been ashamed to write about them, only pretended it, and one had been the prettiest of all – or the autumn morning thirty years ago when he had lain in a field and watched clouds racing across the sky from left to right above him, sunrise to noon, and he had almost got to an understanding of why the heavens move, had become so terrifically excited that he could not understand any

more, and when he came home there was a glorious hot eel pie and he had eaten half of it at a sitting – and here a horse and there a hound, or even a wild beast – a wild cat creeping along a branch, not seeing him, and he not knowing if the arrow would really reach its heart; but he knew now, he had together in his memory the moment of the beast sleek and stretching and untouched, and the second moment of its screeching tumble out of the tree and his own shout of pleasure, and the third moment of his hands on the fur of the lovely, still, dead thing, now completely his. And it was better, surely, to have all three at once, finished, unalterable by any God. This was to be God-like oneself.

He walked over to the curtain and drew it sharply against the sun and against anything that might choose to burst in on him. Not that there would be anything or anyone. When he was younger he could write in the middle of any kind of interruption, he could easily think of two things at once, drink and dance and talk at the top of his voice, while behind, his singing, delighted, secret mind was drunk on its own with a glory of words that presently he could write down and everyone would crowd round to look on and listen, astonished and happy. But now he had to have quiet. He had told the slave at the door he would see no one at all. Because young Strepsiades, son of the sister of his own Strepsiades who was killed, must have his poem. And now they were waiting for him to find the words and bind them down, lovely and fixed and smiling as the memory of joys. The room was half dark

now; that was better. He sat on the chest and stared at the couch, at the shelf on the wall, at the spot of light on the curve of his lyre. He crossed to the couch and sat there; he bent, frowning, over his pen.

'What are you seeing now, Theba, Theba, smiling
With immortal heart not distracted by the pains we know?
In what past day do you dwell, with what beguiler,
Is it the young Dionysos with pale thick hair astray and a-glow
In the beat of Demeter's cymbals, or is it, in the deep twilight,
That shower of gold holding embowered –'

He sat up, listening, and his face jerked; something was going to interrupt him. Just when he had begun, with so much difficulty, so much digging down into himself – he would not have it! He got to his feet, and the door-boy came running in, a clever neat little Syrian who could always be trusted, came breaking up the calm pond of twilight that lay in the room. 'I told her –' he said, 'I told her the master was writing, could see no one! But she –'

And then the curtains were pulled right back and a tall and amazingly beautiful woman came in and shoved a hand over the little slave's mouth so effectively that he not only stopped talking but was pushed right out of the room and did not dare come in again. She said: 'I knew you wouldn't want me shut out, Pindar. I landed yesterday. You are looking older but not different at all.'

Still he said nothing, only looked at her. She laughed and lifted her hands to her head and unpinned the long veil and threw it down on the chest, carelessly, so that it slid to the floor. Her hair was very thick and cut straight at chin-level; the ends of it curled under towards her neck. Again, and immediately, she had made him think of a poem of his own, written a long time ago before he knew her, about the strong maiden, the girl Kyrene, steady on her feet, broad across the breasts for a God's head to lie there. This one too might have fought lions in a wild valley.

'You were working, Pindar,' she said, 'and I've disturbed you. And it's not so easy to start now, is it? I'll wait till you've finished.' She sat down on the chest and drew up one knee through her hands. Her dress was of the finest deep green Ionian linen, pleated and pinned at the shoulders and along the line of the arms, with the same-coloured beasts and trees woven into it, like shadows of a small fantastic world. Her bracelets and girdle were of gold and flat, shining Egyptian beads with marks on them that she perhaps might know, but he did not.

'I was writing,' he said, 'but it can go on another day. No one hurries me nowadays. Where have you come from this time, Pausilla?'

But she did not heed the question. 'Is it a song for a victor?' she asked. 'Oh, for Isthmia! I'd forgotten, but of course that's been happening. Who is he, Pindar?'

'Strepsiades of my own city – the fighting-match.'

She began to speak, but he went on quickly: 'No, not that Strepsiades. His nephew. A boy.'

She smiled quickly and brilliantly. 'Oh, Pindar, one of your boys! How old is he? What's he like, a beauty?'

He smiled a little, to meet hers. 'I don't fall in love so easily now, Pausilla. I think I'm more constant. Strepsiades is a fine, strong boy, but I've seen so many.' He paused, fingering his own greying beard and watching her. As he looked, the smile went out of her face as quickly as it had come, and thin lines began to show round her mouth. He harked back to his first thought of her – his first always – and said: 'What lions have you been fighting, Pausilla?'

She shifted a little on the chest, let her knee drop, and stared back at Pindar. Both the faces had taken on their full weight of age and sadness and reality. 'It's over,' she said.

And he said: 'Did it kill you?'

Pausilla spread out her fingers, looking down at the rings on every finger, emerald and chrysoprase marvellously engraved by the Island craftsmen, eastern gold of eyed snakes, a broad Tyrian ring of very fine green and black enamel. She looked up again and said irrelevantly: 'Have you ever seen a lion?'

He shook his head. 'Never a real one.'

'I have, in Africa. I've been out lion-hunting. It wasn't so very exciting after all. We both went.'

'We – ?'

'Damophilos and I. You know, don't you – Pindar, you know what's happened at Kyrene?'

But he said: 'I don't. Only that there was trouble. And that the white crow had come. Pausilla, tell me, please! Have you been there all this time?'

'Yes,' she said. Then, 'I suppose we came back as fast as the news, my sister and I. It's bad, my dear, it will be bad for you too. All your friends there are dead.'

'And the king?'

'Oh yes, Arkesilas is dead. And Damophilos and Prince Karrhotos. Everyone you knew, Pindar.'

'Oh God,' he said. And then, 'Are you sure?'

She seemed on the point of laughing. It would have sounded terrible in the small space between them. Then her mouth twisted back. 'Quite sure,' she said. 'There's been a revolution. They've a democracy there now. It was all very thorough. I was there the whole time.'

He half drew the curtain again and went over and stood beside her: 'Did the Gods bear too hard on you, Pausilla?' Then, when she said nothing: 'May they be merciful now!'

Suddenly she did laugh then, but at the same time tears began running down her cheeks, not singly, dropping, but all in a gush out of her open eyes, and fell on her dress and made dark stains that clung to her. And after a minute she said: 'One thing at least, Pindar. There are no gods for me now.'

He patted her shoulder, weeping himself, an old man's sparse tears trembling into his beard. 'Yes, yes,' he said, 'that is how one feels at first always, but the Gods go on.'

'But I know,' she said. 'This isn't just feeling; all that was over days ago. And now, now I know with my mind, and I will tell you, Pindar.' Her voice quivered and she asked for water.

He brought it to her in his own gold cup with tritons on it that he had from Hieron. He said gently, 'Tell me.' And then, as she drank, 'You said your sister was with you, Pausilla. Is she in Thebes too? And is she grown as beautiful as she promised when she was a child?'

Pausilla handed him back the cup. 'Oh yes, she's beautiful. There were all sorts of painters and sculptors at Court who wanted to try their hands on her, but my Aspasia wasn't for them. But she's going her own way now.'

'May it be for her good,' said Pindar.

'It will be for good,' the beautiful woman said. 'Because her beauty comes from her mind, just as your boys' beauty comes from their strength and bravery. She's brave, too.'

'May the Gods not take it amiss,' murmured Pindar, remembering the long-legged, high-headed girl he had seen with Pausilla five years before.

'You and the gods!' said Pausilla. 'Do they make you bear things more easily, Pindar? Do you like thinking of their light and happiness when you are in a dark pit?'

'If there were not calm and beauty somewhere –' said Pindar, and then, 'Go on, Pausilla. You went to Kyrene nearly five years ago. With Damophilos. And now you say he is dead.'

She said: 'It was all lovely at first. And one didn't think further ahead than to-morrow. My Damophilos was back at Court and everyone loved him, even the old fox, even Arkesilas, seemed to. We had a great

straggling house outside the city with gardens all round it. There was every kind of fruit there, Pindar, for every season, and a sweet hot smell of sun shedding down through layers and layers of leaves and flowers to the turf where we lay, and the little, still, narrow brooks that went across and across like shuttles, slow and brimming with purple flowers fallen from the creepers floating on them. Sometimes they joined together and there were wide, square ponds with blue water lilies, where we had boats; they hung lamps on them at night. And beyond the gardens there were vineyards and grain fields, and then cactus hedges, and then dry, rolling country with bushes and a little stiff grass, and then the desert where we hunted. And it went on day after day for three years, and I believe we must have been very happy because I never remember thinking about it.' She became silent, with her eyes narrow as though she were keeping hold of hundreds of dear, small images.

'And Damophilos?' said Pindar. 'Were you married to him?'

She shook her head: 'I was a foreigner anyway. And I told him I wasn't meant for marriage, I wanted to be able to go home if I chose. I wanted to be free and not belong to anyone, not even him. All the things I would have told you, Pindar – only you never asked me!'

They smiled at one another, like the old friends they were. 'And Aspasia?' he said.

'Oh, she was growing up, asking questions, making friends with all sorts of people at Court, doing mad

things but never getting hurt. She had to have her own life, I could see that if I saw nothing else. Her good would be her own, not mine; I let her alone. And Damophilos and she loved one another, as I hoped they would. Towards the end of the three years I began to be frightened in case Arkesilas wanted her, so I kept her away from Court as much as I could, but I think it would have been all right, because his taste for clean things was gone, and he didn't want to be reminded that he was old and gone bad; he liked his women fat and easy. Even when you wrote your poems to him, Pindar, he wasn't right, he wasn't like you wanted to think him. Or perhaps you knew all the time – did you? You wouldn't have been the only one to laugh at him! And after that, most of all after the Queen died – it was then though that Karrhotos turned so wise and so loyal, trying to take his sister's place – he got worse steadily, and more apt to have sudden, horrid fits of anger.

'But I liked the Court all the same. One could wear the oddest sort of dresses – so long as they cost enough! And there were always people coming and going, black and brown and white, with new manners and faces and toys and furs and jewels and tame beasts for the King, something to rub one's mind against and laugh about – oh how we did laugh in the long low garden rooms just off the great hall, Damophilos and I and a dozen others we always went about with, Thesté and Prince Karrhotos and Alazir and Karneades that we all called Pussy – he was half grown-up, the son of Telisikrates, you know, with a round soft head

like a cat's, such a dear – and Ladiké and Kleomis. Oh, Pindar, Pindar, when I say them over like that, quite ordinarily, I can't believe they're all dead! I can't. And – and – oh well, let me get back. We were all alive then and that time's not any less real because it's over. And we played hide and seek in and out of the gardens and came in with great boughs of roses dew-drenching our Court dresses and never minded. And there were tame monkeys and leopards that slipped in and out among the crowds and stared with green eyes at the lights, so when one got tired of soft flimsy people and talk, one could lay one's hand for a moment on the rippling tense back of a leopard. And there were fireworks and horses, races and games and always new music.

'But of course it had to be paid for. That was the difficulty. And so had the King's body-guard – and well paid too or we all heard about it! – and the King's mistresses and the King's this and the King's that. It wasn't as if he were so well liked that all this should happen by itself. And he wasn't strong enough just to be violent and dare people not to do what he chose – men always get a following if they do that. But Arkesilas wasn't made that way. He was the last of a great line of kings, and the least. So things were going badly in Kyrene. You see it had all been very well when there was a solid arm between him and Persia, but when the Athenians went to Egypt it was broken.'

Pindar interrupted her suddenly: 'They say that's all going to smash! Athens has gone too far at last. As if they could hold Egypt!'

'Very likely,' said Pausilla, 'but – I don't think I care now. Well, anyway, the people of Kyrene hated Arkesilas and that was that and I don't wonder. And there were always being difficulties and riots and petitions from the merchants that had to be attended to or the old fox wouldn't get his next cargo from Syria, and murders that had to be hushed up, and people who stopped talking suddenly when they saw one, or – just a little later – wanted one to join in and talk too. And Arkesilas used to get savage for days at a time and we'd keep away from Court. It began to get badly on my nerves that fourth year. Sometimes I thought I wanted to go home to Miletos. But I didn't really: with him at Kyrene. I tried to satisfy it in other ways – we both did; he was as bad as I was sometimes. We used to find new gods. There were plenty of gods in Kyrene, plenty of lovely, foreign, exciting things that move one's heart and senses and make one believe one is changed and new and young again. We played that they were true; we wanted them to be so much. We worshipped Osiris and Isis and the golden Aphrodite-looking-outward with all sorts of rites you wouldn't care for, Pindar.'

She gripped the edge of the chest and looked across at him. He fidgeted and made blots with his pen; as she knew, these were the complicated sort of things he hated most. 'Go on,' he said.

She went on. 'At first I used to take Aspasia. I thought it was all wonderful and I wanted her to come too and share. She did come once or twice, and then she laughed at it; I expect I was afraid she might

break it for me. But for a long time it seemed real; it seemed to work. Things do at first if one believes in them hard enough, but that's only one sort of reality. Well, while all this was going on, the people got more and more angry, and hurt and unhappy too I suppose, but I didn't care. And by and by, all the things that were happening to them came into some sort of order in their heads and turned into an idea. That must always be the beginning of democracy, I think. Perhaps it wouldn't have been born if there hadn't been midwives for it. Most of them were little shopkeepers or business people who'd done badly, or pirates who wanted to stay at home, that sort of creature. But there was an Athenian called Chaerephon. I never could see what he was doing at Kyrene to start with; I believe he'd been in exile, but he was more or less of a gentleman at any rate. No, that's not the word I mean. But at least one knew where one was with him. I didn't come across him till later, though.

'Well, things went on for months and then last year there was a bad harvest. That made the final difference to the country people, who'd always been fairly loyal to the King, even at his worst. Even now he might have tided over. Damophilos hadn't been to Court for weeks, but that day he went, trying to get Arkesilas to save himself by helping his farmers. Thesté and Ladiké and I waited for the end of the council in a little vine-arbour there was in the gardens; they brought us new milk and cinnamon and figs, but we didn't touch anything, any of us; we talked about our new dresses. You won't understand, Pindar, but

that's a wonderfully steadying thing if one's a woman waiting. Thesté was very dark, she had Arab blood I think; she could wear reds that were no good to Ladiké or me. She had a red dress on when they killed her. You know, I saw that. I thought they were going to cut her throat. But they clubbed her instead. Oh, I shall make other friends – some day!' She drank again from the triton cup.

'They came out at last and Damophilos said it was hopeless. The King wouldn't budge; he was too old to see what was happening. My man was very angry, but I didn't ask him at once with the others there. He took Karrhotos by the hand and said: "Good-bye till the storm breaks!" And the prince said: "It looks like that. Most likely you're right, Damophilos. But I can't change now." And they both shivered as though there were really a storm coming. So we went home, and my lover told me that the demos wouldn't trust its own leaders and had come to him. We were both of us half proud and half frightened. We couldn't see where we were going, and besides we had such peace together, such a rich and deep-dug soil at the roots of our happiness. We didn't want to jeopardize it. But Arkesilas had turned him out of the palace again, threatening exile if he dared raise his voice. And he couldn't not do something. Damophilos was the justest and best man in Kyrene.' She said this very gently, as a plain statement, as though she had never loved him.

Pindar accepted it. 'I know,' he said, 'and gentle and keen-minded and very generous and very brave.'

She nodded, accepting it too; on that base, she went

on. 'That winter the white crow you've heard about came to Kyrene and flew round and round the palace. First I heard the servants whispering about it; then we began to whisper ourselves. I saw it one evening just at dusk. I think now it was just a crow that happened to be white, but at the time my mind and my judgment were so crammed with huge, toppling hopes and fears that I couldn't see it plain. It sent me off to sacrifice to Gods below and above, to tear my hair, to steep myself in thick myrrh smoke and coloured lights and magic-sounding words till I felt clear of the crow. That seems very queer now. The people made a white crow league; it was the council and army of the revolution. Damophilos and I had white crow rings we wore when they came secretly to the house or when he went among them. There were other nobles and princes in it besides my man: Kleomis, and Learchos of the Hill-with-Horns, and two or three others. And the Athenian Chaerephon was at all the meetings. He wanted to do it gradually, by altering the laws, but what was the use of law-changing with the old fox above all laws, and his bodyguard to make it safe for him? Most were for a quick sweeping away, and after a time Damophilos agreed. More and more came over as it became clearer that there was going to be no help for the King from Persia. They were beginning to make plans. Then there was an accident.

'Arkesilas was building himself a tomb; it was to be bigger than any of the old Kings' with more bronze work and more marble. It was in line with the others half-way down the great street, and had been going

on for years because he never could get it quite to his liking. Now they were making a brick lining for it, and the bricklayers weren't getting their pay up to time. So it all began, nastily enough, with a half-brick at the miserable paymaster, whose fault it certainly wasn't. When they saw him on the ground they went mad like wolves, and someone sent for the palace guards. Then all the labourers and shop people and sailors and street women from round about joined in against the guards and threw bricks to break the horses' legs. It was right in the middle of the town and people got into the fighting whether they liked it or not, and the white crow league began pulling up the paving stones from the great street and they sent a message for Damophilos and the leaders. At first he wouldn't come – it was all too soon – but more guards came up and the democrats were being killed, and at last he had to. It seemed as if the thing were beginning in earnest.

'I didn't waste time saying good-bye to him, but I pulled a cloak over my dress and followed to the place, and heard the yells and felt the hate and saw the wretched dying men dragged out along the gutters by their heels and the poor horses on their sides screeching and catching their hooves into their torn bellies. I couldn't see how the fighting was going till suddenly the whole crowd broke and ran like rats down the side streets and I had to run myself. I ran into a butcher's shop and found myself with two or three of the white crows, who told me that fifty of their friends were killed and as many taken prisoner. Suddenly one of

them said that Damophilos was prisoner too. I didn't take it in for a minute. I stood breathing the stale, raw-meat smell of the shop. And then I began to think what the King would do to my lover. All sorts of horrible things I didn't know I had in my mind. Things I must have heard of and not dared to imagine. The white crows were kind to me; they made me lie down in the inside part of the shop, on the butcher's bed I suppose. But my senses were all horribly sharpened; I heard all they were whispering. By and by, I got back to our house and Chaerephon and Learchos came, very white and anxious and angry with the fools who'd started it. I said: "What shall I do?" And they said I must wait, something could be arranged yet. Aspasia came and stood beside me and pressed her hands over my hands and breasts. I got strength enough from her not to scream aloud. I said: "I will make vows for him – all I have in the world." And Chaerephon said: "That will be best for you." And I stood wondering from what Gods or through what rite I would get the fulfilment of my vow.

'Then it came to me suddenly – or perhaps I had begun thinking it in the butcher's shop – that I had never truly worshipped these strange Gods; it had never been any deeper than a hen-wife's magic. The whole fantastic, peacocking fabric of rites and prayers fell down and left me in cold space just at the very minute I wanted something infinitely strong and safe. I heard Aspasia say sharply: 'My sister is ill – get wine!" and heard them answer and go and come back and speak again, but all the time my mind was busy

looking for the God I should make my vow to, the true God. And I thought of something we had done together, a sacrifice in the Egyptian way – I won't tell you now, Pindar – but I thought I knew that we had blasphemed against Koré and the Mother, and I thought it was They who were real. I saw the Gods of Hellas ranged in front of me, very angry and strong, and I knew I had done something terribly dangerous when I left them. Within an hour I had made my vow to Demeter and Koré, all the money, every jewel I had, for his safety.' She stopped, a little breathless.

Pindar said, gravely: 'You did well.'

'You shall see,' said Pausilla, 'but I thought so then too. I knew, I was sure. But I am sure of something else now. You needn't mind, though, my Pindar; there's nothing to hurt you, only what grows in my thought. There is no reason you should believe me.' She laughed a little. 'Of course you won't, my dear. And I wouldn't alter you.'

But uneasily the poet said: 'You don't know me, Pausilla, not the me that's here now. You know me in my poems. That's different. I'm sure. But I can't be sure all the time.'

As he said this she looked up quickly with her hand to her face: 'Listen! It's Aspasia coming after all.'

Again the curtain parted and this time it was left fully open, and her sister came in and stood between them, very young, and looking even taller than she was, in her long straight cloak not even broken by a fringe at the foot. Her grey eyes drifted from one to the other. 'Your porter let me in,' she said to Pindar.

'He thought two of us were no worse than one. Pausilla has been telling you? But it wasn't like that!'

'It never is,' said Pindar, 'one person alone is never right about a thing. But how you're grown, Aspasia, and what a beautiful girl you are!'

'I shan't be as beautiful as she is,' said Aspasia, looking towards her sister, 'but I shall be different.'

'She means,' said Pausilla quickly and a little shrilly, 'that when she chooses to stop being a virgin she will go and have children by a man, eat life like bread! She doesn't know, she isn't grown up like you and me!' But the sisters were speaking to one another now, not to Pindar, going on from wherever they had been when they stopped talking last.

'Why should you think me a fool? You know you wanted a child at the end,' said Aspasia, gently speaking the hard thing that must come to the top of both their thoughts: 'you know how much better it would be for you now and perhaps for others if you had a child by Damophilos. But you tried to get something for nothing. And one can't.'

'I did for five years, though,' said Pausilla, 'and I might have gone on but for – but for – things that men did, men and not Gods!'

Aspasia sat down beside her on the chest and began stroking her head and arms, holding her gently and strongly, murmuring to her. Pindar began to pick with one finger at the lowest string of his lyre. The poem was beginning to come back into his head, bits of it shaping themselves. He would go on with the old, old, immortal things, the gazing backwards into the heart

of the moments of beauty, one after another. If he could do it. But he could of course; he knew he was a poet; everyone knew!

'Memory sleeps, fades, men forget:
It grows real only one way,
Only a poet can make dawn in a dead day,
Or a dried tear wet.'

That might be true. If one could think of it always, think of oneself not as a suffering and ageing and lonely man, but as a poet, part of a race set apart that would go on for ever and ever and never be anything but young and eager and forward-looking, so long as Apollo and the Muses kept their power and godhead. He sighed and looked across at the two sisters; they were quite quiet now. Suddenly Pausilla went on. 'I made my vow, and somehow it had made me happy enough to eat supper quietly and talk again to Chaerephon and Learchos, and then go to bed and sleep for quite a long time. And it took me over the morning and the things that had to be done. We couldn't find cut anything. Then Ladiké came from the palace and said it was all as bad as I'd thought at the worst. He was chained in the dungeons and guarded every moment. And the King had been laughing. The only chance was bribery and I gave Learchos all the money in the house and told him to come back for more. He asked me, for the sake of the democracy that Damophilos had fought for, to keep out of danger myself; I would only tie their hands again. So there was nothing to be done.

'It was then it came into my mind that really my vow that sounded so fine had meant nothing at all, because, however much I gave to the Goddesses, Damophilos would give it me back twice over. And instantly all the hopes I had been having (though I scarcely recognized them for that) died down and I was left in horrible despair and imagining with my own body every pain that might be happening to my lover. It was about then that Pussy came in – Karneades – and sat with us for a time. I felt curiously bitter against him for being alive and well and comparatively safe – him and Aspasia.'

As she dropped her head into her hands again, Aspasia leant over and kissed her, and then spoke softly to Pindar over her sister's shoulder. 'The queer thing was that before, when there was nothing to go on, she'd been almost happy for moments at a time, but when Pussy brought news that there was a chance, she wouldn't believe it. We tried to make her, but she just sat and shivered. After that he and I stayed for a long time talking about mathematics. He wasn't as intelligent or as good as Damophilos; it doesn't matter so much – clearly – that he's dead too, but he was so young, and he hadn't done more than get the first taste out of life, and he did like it so! He loved all that last time really, the secrets and hiding and fighting and surprises, as if it had been a tremendous game. I don't see why he should have got killed!'

'There's no why,' said Pindar,' one just has to take it. Try to forget it, Aspasia, dear child.'

Pausilla lifted her head suddenly. 'In the very

middle of the night when everyone was asleep but me Damophilos came back. I don't think I can tell you now what I felt because it's all so changed and blurred by what came afterwards. I only remember the rightness, the exquisiteness, of everything I touched or heard or saw. You're a poet, Pindar, you can think for yourself how it was. He told me what had happened, or part of it, for he was dazed still. You see, Prince Karrhotos just came into the dungeon and unlocked his chains and went out with him through a long, dripping passage that must go under the lake, and let him out at the end into one of the stone summer-houses. He made his way out of the gardens and back across the city to our house.

'He said: "Karrhotos must have run the most horrible risks for me. He wouldn't speak about it, or let me." and then he said again: "I don't know about the other prisoners." But they weren't real to me at all then. Only I felt if I could ever have done anything to show Karrhotos – Oh well, you know how brave the Prince was, Pindar.'

And Pindar remembered the chariot race at Delphi and the smashing and splintering of the chariot poles and the plunging, squealing stallions mad to bite and kick anyone, and Prince Karrhotos with all his weight flung back on the reins as his team got to the winning post! And the courage and skill that had brought his chariot, the only one unbroken out of forty, through the race. That was the first time; and the second time two years later at Olympia one of his traces had caught in the chariot next him, and he had leant right over, while everyone held their breaths in horror, and freed

it, and come in first again. That was what a prince ought to be like. But they grow old and rotten and swell themselves with pride to make up for their lost strength, and though he had been friends with tyrants, he could see that this was no good rule for a city.

But while he was remembering, Pausilla began telling her story again. 'During the next two days we heard how the other prisoners had been killed. They were mostly just the bricklayers and so forth, but all the same they were men. And I used to dream of masked people doing that to Damophilos. I told him about my vow and he said I must do what I wanted; I think he thought it had helped. So I gave all my necklaces and ear-rings as a beginning; I didn't mind at all, but at the same time it didn't seem very important. He gave me others at once, his own mother's court necklace for one, all of great thick rubies and gold. I wore it the first evening to please him. But I couldn't really care for them, or for any presents – for any mere things. And all our tranquillity was gone. The white crows were at the house constantly, or else he'd go down to the town and meet them there. Then there was fighting again. Oh I was so tired, Pindar, all, all the time! One couldn't not be thinking of it every moment. I suppose it didn't really last very long, reckoning by hours, but one's whole life got so full of it that one couldn't even remember beautiful things nor see them in front of one. The demos won, but you won't have heard it earlier, Pindar, because they got the harbour almost at once and stopped any ships from sailing. Yes, they won. But most of the decent men, the leaders they'd chosen

from above, were killed – because they led in the fighting too, I suppose. Kleomis and Learchos were both killed and Chaerephon the Athenian was wounded and brought back to our house in the evening. But something much worse happened. Damophilos killed Karrhotos on the top of a barricade in the great street. It was an accident, of course, I don't quite know what sort. He wouldn't talk about it, even to me. And perhaps it would have been worse for the Prince in the end if anything else had happened. And I think this too: the white crows were watching Damophilos – even then – to make sure that he was all on their side, and the same way Arkesilas would have been watching the Prince: so it had to happen. But after that one knew things would never come right again.

'When the guards were beaten they attacked the palace. The old fox was killed better than he deserved. By the time they got him they were all too angry not to kill at once. It seemed at first as if things were quieting down and I came to the palace too. We were very anxious about our friends there. I suppose we expected too much of the demos; after they'd seen how easy it was to smash things and how easy it was to kill they wouldn't take orders or advice from anyone. It was all about as horrible as it could be. It was then that Thesté and Ladiké were killed; you see, they thought one could laugh when people are hating one very much. Alazir was killed then too; they chased him into one of the tower rooms and he jumped. But by and bye it was morning, and the revolution was over.

'Well, I told you the democracy was suspicious of

Damophilos. At first he tried to reason with them and have the state ruled by a Council of the chosen best. But after the first few days they wouldn't have it. Everyone wanted his finger in the pie. They were jealous of Damophilos and hated him because of that first time when he had escaped and not the others; so after a while he tried to keep out of what was going on and stay in the house with me. But that seemed just as difficult. The white crows used to come for him and make him tell them what to do. Only they didn't like him any the better when he did! And they started killing people, not in hot blood but saying it was justice. The last of our old friends went that way, even Pussy, dreadfully surprised and trying to argue about it. Chaerephon was angry and hurt with them for not taking Athenian advice; he told them they were fools as soon as he was well enough to stand. Then they didn't listen to him. And nobody did any work except the women, and when ships that didn't know came into harbour, as likely as not they would be badly treated. We thought it was no use staying on, the only sane ones among all those madmen. We were going to try getting away inland by horse; it would have meant Damophilos losing all his land and money and any position he had, but Kyrene was getting more and more dangerous. He did not go to the council of the crows one day. That same evening ten of them, most of whom we hadn't seen before, came to the house and said he must go with them. The servants would have fought, but he didn't let them. He kissed me and went.

'Later on Chaerephon brought me news that he was

in prison waiting to be judged; he was anxious about himself too. He said there was very little hope for Damophilos and asked me what I would do. I told him about my vow; he and I and Aspasia talked together most of the evening. He was a religious man in some ways. He believed at least that somehow Themis was behind the Gods, that Justice had us all in a net and sooner or later would draw it in. Clearly my first vow had been in vain because it meant nothing to me, or so little, nothing compared with what I asked. I wondered what would count with the Gods; what could I give that really mattered to me, that would really change my life and happiness? – if it was that they were jealous of. At last I knew. I did not tell either of them, but about dawn I went to the shrine of Koré and the Mother and made a vow that from that day on I should live utterly chaste. I did not even say "if he lives." I thought only that if They saw me broken and poor in my pride and my whole way of life, They might stay their hands; but I must leave it to Them. You see, Pindar, it meant giving up everything in the world I wanted and was good at, my life with Damophilos if he did escape, my chance of a child by him (Aspasia is right to say I wanted that then, though we hadn't before), and, in any case, my whole future life, my food and shelter even. You do understand?'

He said: 'They should have taken that.'

And the girl Aspasia frowned and blushed and said nothing.

She said: 'It was quite a little shrine and rather dark. I came away feeling that something very important had

happened. When I got home I slept for a little, and then the white crows came to say I might go and see him in prison. And I thought, now it is coming and this is the reality I have been seeking for at last. And on my way there, on foot across the city, I regretted nothing, I could only feel the burning of wonder and excitement. I saw him in the prison. He was fairly hopeful. They kept him there ten days, and most of the days they let me see him, but not for very long. It's all clear in my head now, clear and sharp, the way there, the shops I passed, every one of the steps up inside the prison – some of them were worn in the middle – the first and the fifth –'

'Oh stop!' said Aspasia suddenly, 'oh please, Pausilla, please finish! I can't bear it either!' And she who had stayed so calm and untouched was crying now with her face red and mouth wide open like a child.

'The last time I went he was lying along the bench and he was dead. They'd killed him. That's the end, dear.'

After a time Pindar said: 'When he was in exile and living in Thebes he used often to come and see me. He's been in this room, sitting where you sit, Pausilla. But mostly he liked to be out and moving about. It is incredible that all those people who were so much alive, who are alive still if one thinks of them suddenly, should be dead. I don't know what it means. He and Strepsiades ran a race up the hill in full armour, for a bet. It seems not – not likely that they should be dead.'

'It is the only reality, all the same,' said Pausilla. Aspasia looked up and began some sort of protest, but she was still crying too much. Her sister started strok-

ing her hair. 'That, you see, was the democracy of Kyrene. I suppose all democracies are the same more or less. I think there must be something inherently cruel and stupid in them, the reduction of everyone in a crowd to the lowest. It seems bound to happen whenever there is a revolution.'

But here Aspasia did protest: 'But it's not! You're not fair, Pausilla! Even before – before the end of the ten days, things were much better, they really were! They'd got some sort of order into the State, they'd stopped robbing foreigners and started working again, they were making a constitution! The stupidest ones were beginning to obey. It was – oh, it was just bad luck that he was killed then. Oh, Pindar, it was better than Arkesilas, anyway! Pausilla says I'm silly about it because I've talked so much with Chaerephon, but I'm sure a democracy might be beautiful. It would only be a matter of teaching people to think – everyone ought to be able to think! It would be so lovely to be one of the teachers of a democracy! At first, when we thought things were all right, I envied Pausilla, because Damophilos was going to be that and perhaps she might help. There would be all the chances for everyone to do something new in a democracy, and best of all if it trusted one and let one advise it!'

She stopped, panting: the other two looked at one another and shook their heads. Suddenly Pausilla sat up straight. 'I must tell you the end, Pindar, even if you hate me for it. Half-way through the ten days I suddenly got tired of it all again, all these Gods and vows and sacrifices. For a time it seemed even as if

the reality had been taken out of everything in the world; it startled me to touch a wall and find my hand didn't go through it. I looked at Aspasia with cold eyes. It was fantastic to go on living at all in such a flimsy and worthless world. I would not have cared then if all the blackguards in Kyrene had come and strangled me. But, having my mind pointed one way at the beginning of this, I still followed it and by and by I came up out of that pit. At least I never told *him* what was happening to me; I'm glad of that now. Then, after the end, at first I was too stunned to know what I thought. I let my sister and Chaerephon smuggle us all out of Kyrene in a boat. The demos was safe enough by this time to free the harbours. I did not even come to the side of the boat to see the last of the land where I had been so happy for nearly five years, where Damophilos and all our friends were buried. I did not care what anyone said to me.

'But soon enough the sea air came blowing through to me, and the ship bounded and bucked across the big waves and the sailors ran up and down, and I found I was back in the ordinary world. Damophilos was dead; that was the touchstone of reality. It left me some things; water was still wet, the sun still hot, the stinging jelly fish still stung when one trailed one's hands in the sea; people talked and expected one to answer; Chaerephon would have liked to make love to Aspasia but did not dare, and she never noticed; perhaps we should meet pirates, or perhaps not. Yes, they were real enough in their way, but not very important. But when beside that one, tremendous, quite unbelievable

fact, I held up the Gods and my vow, there was not the slightest reality left. They were stuffed dolls and I was a child beating my head on the floor. Why not stand up? I was too sure even to laugh. And I am sure still. The Gods were made by men to comfort themselves with the thought of one thing at least sure and eternal, one absolute truth and justice that they could measure their own by; but when men see why the Gods were made, the Gods are dead. The first time one sees that, one is angry. I was. I was angry with myself for being tricked, mostly. I did something you'll think horrible, Pindar; it was in a way, if one counts it as real; I didn't. I wanted to break my vow, to show myself how angry I was and how little I cared for all the things I'd so lived on before. There was no one I wanted to break it with: how could there have been? I thought of men more as enemies than friends. I chose the captain of the ship; he was a middle-aged, stubby little wretch with warts on one hand. He hadn't looked my way, of course. I took trouble. I seduced him as if he'd been a boy and broke my vow with him once. He still doesn't know a bit what happened, the fool! He tried to give me money. Well, that's that. So I landed. The boat was bound for Delion anyway. And I came here because I wanted to see you, Pindar, and because he'd lived here.'

Pindar said nothing, did nothing, did not even look at her.

Aspasia bent her arms and clasped her hands tight over her elbows. She said: 'It may be true about the Gods, but that was horrible! It was a wrong against

yourself and against life. I couldn't sleep or eat when I knew. Pausilla – oh why did you!'

Pausilla said: 'I've told you why, once.'

Then no one said anything. There was no noise at all in the room till Aspasia began kicking her heel slowly against the chest. Pindar took up his lyre and began to play it, very gently, humming to himself. Pausilla stirred a little and turned her head away, then said low: 'Don't, oh don't! It hurts so. It goes right through me and leaves the pain bare!'

Pindar stopped playing; after a time he said: 'Where are you going next, Pausilla?'

She said vaguely: 'I might go home.'

Aspasia said: 'I am going to Athens. I won't stay here, Pindar, and I can't go home! I shall stop there with mother's second cousin Kleitagoras. He does some sort of a silly business, ships and things I suppose, but anyway he's quite well off and he's got a grown-up daughter and I know they'll have me!' She stopped, defiantly, staring at the other two.

Pindar seemed really disturbed: 'To Athens! But why?'

Aspasia said: 'Because that's what Kyrene ought to have been like – if they'd taken Chaerephon's advice. Because it's new. Anyway, because Athens is the only place I want to go to!'

Pindar said: 'Athens has gone too far, Athens has dared too much in its pride and violence. Athens will come to some terrible end. You must not be there for that, Aspasia.'

She said: 'I like taking risks.' And then: 'They're

writing things there. The plays! I do want to see all the plays, Pindar; isn't it true what they say? Hasn't the God come to Æschylus?'

'I suppose so,' said Pindar slowly, 'but he wants to change the world too. He won't let ill alone – or good. He's too much of an Athenian, even if he is a poet.'

'What if I don't give you the money?' Pausilla said.

'Well,' said Aspasia slowly, 'Chaerephon said he hoped he'd see me again in Athens. I've got enough to pay for my journey and then I could let him know where I was. I can dare that too!'

'You'd better let her go,' said Pindar.

Pausilla nodded. 'I think so. Pindar, what did you make of the end of my story?'

He left it unanswered for a time, then: 'I might have said "Where are you breaking your vow next?" I've no best friend these days, Pausilla. But I'm too old, and too sad. We should be bad for one another. As to the Gods: I don't think the thing is so. I want my world to work. Not that it's a very happy world, but it's in it that I'm a poet, and I have to hold to that – haven't I?'

'Yes,' she said.

'So I must have the Gods, because without them it might split up under my eyes, there might be no reason left for anything to stay in order. Do you see, Pausilla?'

'I see,' she said, 'well, I hope I haven't hurt your world!' She went over and kissed him, then said: 'Now, we're going.'

'Why?' he said.

'Oh, to buy new clothes, I suppose. If one can get them here. We couldn't bring much with us. And

you see, if I've got to say good-bye to my sister – well, I've got to get used to that, haven't I, and I want to look at her for as long as I can. But we'll come to supper this evening. Have stewed sweet-breads, there's a dear, with parsley sauce! And if you've got any friends alive still, ask them.'

She stooped a quick hand for her veil and pinned it again over that thick hair. Aspasia had never dropped her cloak the whole time. They both went out.

Pindar stared after them as they left, stared at the shaken curtain till it was still and the room just as it had been. He felt oddly cold. He began to remember his poem; it came shyly and yet insistently through his other thoughts, through the images he was keeping of the two women, young Aspasia who could still hope the world might be good, still make friends and get excited over new things, and Pausilla – more like himself – but that supple body and strong arms, that thick brown hair – a tall, brown-haired Muse . . .

'To the brown-haired Muses I will tell the story,
They will make to burn
With your young name in a double glory –'

Oh Strepsiades, my friend Strepsiades, what is the good of all this about you when you're dead and can't know. What is the good of all this writing when people die. Being a poet. Take that touchstone of reality she had, take death: then the poetry isn't real any longer. It can't do any of the things I said it could do. Oh Apollo, my God, make it come real to me again. Let me go on, let me go on.

PYTHIAN XI

Oh my friends, I have been astray, vainly,
At the cross ways, the many roads of the mind:
A straight path I had once, away plainly,
Now, my soul's boat, your course is again to find!

Let us leave all this bitterness, this hate, striving
Against evil tongues, sorely, as in the story, that Queen
Klytaimnestra, the unforgetting, with her fate driving
The grey sword in her hand to ways that she had not seen.

Turn again, turn, to the happy, at whom no tongue, groping
In the dust for hate, throws words heavy and sharp with pain,
Whose joy, in their city, shines softly always, whose young hoping
Better than kingdoms, has given me sight of beauty again.

Oh let me know nothing but this, this beauty, my eye only
Seeing that death is beaten by a child's pride in his father's name!

Their green graves could not hold the souls of the heroes, to lie lonely,
But a long morrow took them, and the great brightness of their fame.

TAKE BACK YOUR BAY WREATH

For just one moment I was too dazed to know. It was as if I had spent a whole life trying to get both his shoulders on to the ground, and then I did it, and that life was over, and for just the space of time between doing it and knowing I had done it, I was dead or unborn and nothing was real to me till I looked up out of the hollow pit between the long benches and saw Theon's face with such joy on it that sharply his joy went into me. I was back in life again and heard the shouting all round me as a real thing, and straightened myself and felt my body on fire with the force of the wrestling in that bare sun, and then the sweat and oil running in long drops down my back, and I knew that the God had blessed me to be one of his winners. And while we watched the chariot races below in the valley Father was standing at one side of me and Theon at the other, and I held their hands tight, and all the time I could hear the people behind us whispering, and feel them looking at my bay wreath, and I think I was happier than anyone else in the world.

At the end of the chariot races everyone had dinner, sitting about on the rocks under the red, echoing cliffs of Delphi, and Father left me with Theon. We ate bread and apples, and he told me how glad he was,

looking at me gently and softly, and said I had been more beautiful than he had ever seen me, even when I had won in our own Games at home. I remember laughing and accepting it, because I still felt light enough to bear the heavy gold of praise. He looked at me hard with his still eyes, bluer, I think, than mine, and he said, 'Aristomenes, I am making a song for you – when we go home.' And then he said, 'I don't know if it will be good enough for you,' and he looked sad, so that I couldn't bear it, and laughed and kissed him, and then we threw apples at one another till Father came back with my uncle, and Keramon, my cousin.

Keramon was twenty, older than me but not so old as Theon. And he was – ah, God help me, he is! – beautiful, like some bronze thing suddenly come alive. He moved like that, as if life had been new poured into him and he was still in the glory of it. His skin was very brown and his beard short and soft; he was like some strong wild beast with the bloom and pride of its spring coat on it. I had seen him often enough at home in Ægina, but he never noticed me much; I hadn't done enough to make him notice. Though when I had won before in the other Games I always hoped he would: but I hadn't been old enough to make him, and those Games hadn't really mattered compared with this.

Most of his friends were quite grown-up, Deinias, and Kleonikos and the rest of them; they always made me feel a baby when I was training for this and they sometimes used to come in and watch. So now, when Keramon did notice me, I was pleased – who wouldn't be ? and I saw Father was pleased too. We talked about

all sorts of things, very easily. You know the way talk goes like a running fire when both want it and both are happy, only before I'd never had quite that, I'd mostly been the youngest, and then one has to sit still and wait till somebody asks one a question. So this was lovely! And again, I wasn't afraid of my happiness: the bay wreath seemed to justify it. It wasn't quite like talking to Theon; that was always easy enough, but different: it was never careless, darting about like a fish, but always a little serious, I suppose because we loved one another and were being careful never to say anything that could hurt. And because we respected one another too. I don't think I respected my cousin much, except for his beauty and because he was that much the elder. And I felt him looking at me all the time, looking and smiling, and that pleased me very well, though it wasn't the way Theon used to look. But I knew I was well shaped – how could Phoibos have given me his victory otherwise? – and I knew that this winning must have made a kind of glow over my body as it had over my mind. With all that, talking to Keramon was like dancing when one has had just enough wine. At least I've thought so since; before that I'd never been up late at a feast. So we went on, laughing a lot, and every now and then I'd look over my shoulder at Theon. He said nothing and looked serious enough, but I never thought I was hurting him, I wouldn't have gone on if I had. Oh, not then!

I could see my father, with my uncle, strolling about a little way off, talking to people, pointing at us three, and I knew they were envying him his son. It was a

lovely crowd, all in their best clothes, with lots for everyone to eat and drink and talk about, some of them lying under the big rocks and fig trees wherever there was a bit of shade, and some on the move, seeing a man they knew half across the grounds, shouting and laughing and making friends, and no one quarrelling because of being at Delphi in the Gods' peace time, and every here and there the ones with the bay wreaths, like mine, making circles of pride and joy and goodness. By and by they came back with an old man between them, a man with a white beard and a red face and long, clever hands, who frightened me somehow and made me want to defend myself at once.

I got up, and Father said: 'You will have a great honour done you, son. Here is Pindar who saw the wrestling and will write us a victory song.'

'About me?' I said, staring, because I knew about Pindar; he had written for some of our friends, though not lately, and I knew how much they had to pay him. He was the most expensive poet of all, and had been writing for longer than anyone. He was so old that perhaps he is dead now. I hope he is!

Pindar was talking to my uncle, who'd been a winner too in his time, and looking under his eyebrows at me, rather hard and more coldly than I liked. I didn't want him to write about me! I said to Father: 'But Theon –' only then I stopped, because Theon had caught my wrist from behind and tugged at it, whispering 'Don't!' Father hadn't really heard, still less understood, and I wasn't brave enough to go on by myself. Then Pindar turned and began talking to me. I answered back

crossly and stupidly like a child. I was feeling sore and rumpled, as if my best day were being spoiled for me by something, I didn't quite know what, and here was this old Pindar with his white head tossed back as if he could do anything he liked with his own business and the rest of the world as well. All my angriness turned against him. I wanted to upset him as he had upset me; but I couldn't, I only worried Father and made my uncle laugh. If Theon had been beside me, he could have made me good again with one word, but he was behind and out of reach, and my cousin Keramon was standing on my left, backing me up – I could feel it – when I was silliest. Somehow, I couldn't have modesty or reverence in me with him there.

Pindar smiled at me, I remember, a thin deliberate smile of completest merriment, like a God. And he twisted one finger in his beard, and began to talk to Father while I was in the middle of saying something. They talked about politics, the chance of Athens getting really smashed up and our being free again. Any other time I would have listened, but now I only wanted to show off to Keramon.

I hate to think of the rest of that day. I kept on telling myself that I was happy and blessed, but I wasn't. The colour had gone out of everything. Keramon was there all the time; once or twice I wanted him to go away so that I could go back to Theon, but I never did anything about it, and Theon didn't come near us, or, if he did, he wouldn't talk or try to get me to come with him. He was being hurt then, but he never told anybody. There was one thing that was worst of all. It

was when I said something about Theon, and my cousin had laughed rather horridly, calling him by one of those nicknames that I knew those friends of his had – for my friend! But it was funny and half-true, like most unkind things, and I laughed too. And I found myself telling a story against him: because one-half of Theon always had been odd and clumsy and shy, so that he tried to protect it – from everyone but me. Then in the middle I saw what I was doing and ended it off suddenly, and hoped Keramon wouldn't notice I was blushing. I wondered if I would ever have the courage to tell Theon I had laughed at him with someone he didn't like. For they never could have liked one another, those two; I was just half-way between, I could see. But that day I wanted to forget what I'd done, cover it up quick; I went on talking and joking and trying to pretend to myself that Keramon hadn't heard, wouldn't anyhow repeat it: I hadn't done anything quite as bad as that!

Theon went home to Ægina before we did. I could see I had hurt him, but somehow I couldn't put it right, I couldn't go back to where we had been. Father was worried with me because I was cross and silly and not happy. He thought it was the strain of the training. But he was glad that Keramon and I were going about together; he would always rather have had him for my friend than Theon – Theon who was so much older, and looked it, who was sometimes so shy and always so quiet, who cared more for the music than for the song, more for the fleetness than for the race, more for the good than for beauty! I did tell Father about Theon's

song, and he frowned and said it was a good thing there wasn't any chance of that coming to anything now, and seemed to think I was very ungrateful for the song he was having made for me – Pindar's song. And I was ungrateful at first. But by and by, with everyone telling me what a great poet he was and all that, I began to look at it differently, and think that now my name was going to be made into something very beautiful that would stay and be an honour to my house and to Ægina so long as men love the Muses. That was how I felt by the time we were home again, and that was what I told Mother when she asked me what I liked best of all the honours that I'd won.

Theon was away in the country for the first days after I came back. I wanted to see him again. I was beginning to get a little frightened. It seemed to me that if I didn't see him soon something would happen. So the morning of the third day I got Mother to bake me a cake with raisins in it, which I don't like much but he does, and give me a tiny pot of run honey from the store cupboard, and I started off. For some reason the whole town was smelling of marigolds; I suppose someone had been carrying garlands home from the market.

And then I met Deinias, who stopped me and said Keramon was looking for me.

'Well,' I said, 'I'm sorry, but I must go on now.'

'Where are you going?' said Deinias, 'where better than with me and Keramon?'

And then all at once I felt ashamed to say I was going to Theon with a cake my mother had made for us! It seemed not grown-up enough. And besides I did want

to see Keramon: I hadn't the day before, and I'd got used at Delphi and during the journey home, to seeing him about all the time. My eyes missed him curiously, and my ears too, because he had a most lovely voice, for talking or singing, better than Theon's, I suppose, though he never cares much about what he sings, just scraps of songs and catches that have happened to come his way mostly. So I said, 'I know, but all the same I must go on, Deinias.'

He said, 'Keramon will be very angry with me if I don't keep you!' and began walking up the street with me, which made me feel very uncomfortable, for I didn't know how far he was going.

Then we saw Keramon himself. He ran over to us, smiling, and said to me: 'You're coming with us! That's fine.' I began to say again that I was sorry, but I had to go; only he looked so disappointed that I couldn't get it out properly.

'Where?' he asked, and then, suddenly: 'Oh, Theon, of course!'

Then I didn't know what to do. Here was my chance to get away, and yet I was half sure if I said 'Yes' that, one way or another, they'd laugh at Theon, and just this moment I couldn't bear that, either his being laughed at or them laughing. So I said No. Well, by that time it was true. But I thought I could do it the next day instead.

We went down to the agora. Deinias was very nice to us; at least, I'm not sure now if it was really niceness he meant. But anyhow he bought us a monkey, to have between us, and we laughed about it for ever so long.

I'd never touched one before, it was so funny, with horrid smooth little hands like a ghost. I didn't know what to do with the cake, so I broke it up and gave it to the rest of the beasts in the same shop when Keramon wasn't looking.

Then we went back with Deinias and talked some more, and I sent a message home that I was having supper there. After supper one or two of the others came in and we played finger games and forfeits. I was sitting by Keramon and suddenly he said to Deinias, 'I'll tell him, I must tell him!' 'Well,' said Deinias, 'it was to be a secret.' But Keramon, who was a little drunk, threw one arm round me and whispered that he was to be chief singer in my victor-song. I knew it was finished, but I didn't know what Father was arranging. I got excited and began to ask more about it, but he wouldn't tell me anything else; just shook his head at me with bright eyes and hair under a wreath of thick ivy and flowers that was slipping half off.

The next morning Mother said, 'Well, how was Theon?' She liked what I'd told her about him before. So I had to say he wasn't there. I found I couldn't go that day either, because I'd said the night before that I'd meet Kleonikos down at the harbour, where there was a merchant ship from Egypt unloading. And the next day was the same, and there was everything to arrange for the feast the next week, when Father was going to have my song sung. Pindar was to be there himself; he had lots of friends in Ægina, and was sure to get as much praise as even poets like.

Theon came back to the city just before the feast day.

I met him quite by accident one hot afternoon when I'd just come back from a practice with my trainer – because, in a few years I suppose I shall be grown-up unless something happens, and wrestling again. I was going to find Keramon at the Bronze Aiakos, and then look at our monkey. But when I saw Theon I ran up to him and asked him what he'd been doing. We talked, of course, and once he put his arm round my shoulder, but I did most of it; he kept on looking at me with his eyes and mouth troubled. That made him seem much older, and, besides, he wasn't saying things easily and happily as I wanted him to. I asked him what was the matter, why he was glaring at me: 'I've not changed in two weeks, have I?' I said. Instead of laughing he said: 'I think you have, Aristomenes.' And I shivered and said suddenly that I must go, but would he be sure to come to the feast. He said he would, and then I ran off, because I didn't want to miss the monkey. I forgot to ask him about his poem, but yet I'm not sure if he wanted me to. I believe the only poem that interested him to think about then was Pindar's.

I found Keramon, who'd waited for me, and went to my uncle's house. We teased the monkey and gave it a tortoise to play with, and then we had a match with his fighting cocks, and I climbed the tree in the front court of their house and didn't think more than I could help about Theon and being changed.

The day of the feast we were all very busy, and full of plans to make everything about the house specially beautiful and splendid: it was like a birthday, only hundreds of times more important and more exciting.

I only wished I could have been just a little bit happier, that would have made all the difference. I didn't know then quite why I wasn't. Pindar was there with Father, showing him how he wanted the chorus to come in. I hadn't heard the song yet myself, and I wondered what they were going to say about me.

When it came to the feast time, I was on Father's right, among the older people, which was dull in a way, but still I could see everyone, and besides, I didn't really want to play and talk and eat and drink a lot that evening. I wore my bay wreath and stayed rather still because it felt as if I wasn't a boy any longer, and not a man either, but something quiet and lasting, half-way to the heroes, who have stopped being alive and are not dead. Pindar was opposite me on Father's left, with everyone coming up and talking to him, among them Deinias who had a song himself from Pindar five years before when he won at Nemea. Deinias sat on the couch beside him for quite a long time; Pindar liked looking at him, though he never seems to me as beautiful as my cousin. But there wasn't much that Pindar didn't like looking at; his eyes shifted about the room, picking people out – or not people: things: dishes of fruit, crusts of loaves, the curve out of the great wine jars, red and white flowers in a garland, folds of a cloak slipping down off bare shoulders – he looked at them quickly and steadily, smiling and tapping with his fingers on the edge of the couch. From where I was I could see him very well, even when I was being talked to by my other uncle, who was next me and always wants to be listened to hard.

Keramon and most of the younger friends we have were at the other end of the hall. Theon was opposite me but some way down. He was watching Pindar too. My father was very happy at having them all in his house.

They cleared the space between the tables; I knew it was for the chorus. Then they came in, with staffs and green wreaths, and stood in a double line, with Keramon a little to the front at one side, and the second chorus leader at the other. At first I was looking at them all the time, but when I did that it was difficult to stay quiet, because they were singing to me, so I looked at Pindar instead.

Before the singing started at all, there was a harp playing for a long time, the sweet single notes plucked off and chasing each other through the air. Then Keramon began the invocation of Peace, and in a few lines his half of the chorus came in with a great leaping clamour of voices together for the hurling down of pride and strength and insolence, so that we all at the same time thought of Athens and how things were beginning to come right at last. When they sang about me, Father leant over and put his hand on my shoulder. They sang about my uncles too, and they sat up, looking stiff and happy. At the end of each verse the voices fell away, giving one time to breathe again and make a place in one's spirit for the music. The little harp notes flew outwards like birds from a shaken tree, and then Keramon would lift his head once more and make everything lovely with his voice.

I could not understand the middle part of the song;

it seemed to be more for Pindar himself than for anyone of us. I wanted it to be about me again; he'd said so little and yet I knew he'd been there and seen me win. He was looking steadily at the chorus now, his lips pursed and his forehead a little wrinkled, his body just moving to the flow of his own words. Suddenly I thought that Theon's song would have been different; after that, for a moment, I could scarcely listen to the music, even to Keramon calling on the Far-Darter. Then the song turned back to us and to our House.

He seemed to know the delight of it all, the joy of being young and winning with one's own skill and strength, and coming home and being welcome, and the sweetness of praise by the people one loves. And then he took it all and withered it up in his dry, old man's mind and gave it to me as a handful of dust. 'Short,' they sang, 'oh short is the growing time of happiness, and as quickly as it grows it comes to its end when the unlucky and certain thing comes out of the mind and is said.' Then, as they were all singing, Pindar turned towards me and looked at me, curiously but coldly, as one might look at a strange beast, and then, as I breathed quicker, twisting my hands together, he nodded and looked away again. And I knew he had seen what was happening to me in the sunlight at Delphi, within so little – oh so little – a time of my victory and my happiness, and had put it all pitilessly into his song.

They went on singing. 'What a foolish and flimsy thing is man! What lovely things he is not!' And I thought how my best day had been spoilt for ever,

and I tried to see what Theon was thinking, but I couldn't.

At the end it was gentler again, and it ended with a prayer for Ægina, our dear city. They sang it slowly all together, both of the choruses, holding up their hands with the long white staffs. When it came to the finish everyone stayed quiet for a little. Pindar himself was the first to move. Later I heard him say to my father, 'I have never made a better triumph song than that; no, not when I was a lad and in love with the winner. Sometimes, I tell myself I'm getting an old man – but not to-day!' I wonder why he liked it as much as all that, whether because it was beautiful or because he had been able to dig the truth out of me across fifty years and set it all down as in a mirror and watch me look at myself and be afraid.

Everyone came up to me at the end with all sorts of praises and good wishes. It was very late and I was tired and dazed. Theon was there a moment. I said, 'Oh, I must see you later!' But he only said, 'It was a wonderful song!' and went out, his eyes full of it. Pindar had Keramon beside him then, Keramon leaning on his staff and a green, shiny leaf lodged in the hollow of his shoulder. I could see how Pindar liked him, how he enjoyed having had his poem sung by someone like that. He hadn't even looked at Theon. After that, Keramon came and sat beside me, and I leaned my head back against his arm. I wanted to take the bay wreath off because it was running into me, but I couldn't till everyone was gone. Then Father and I hung it up beside the crowns I had won at the other games. But

none of them were touched by a God the way this one is; none of them had made me so happy that something had to happen.

I slept very late the next morning. When I woke up I tried to remember all about my triumph song and what it was that had made me so unhappy. But I couldn't. At least, I knew what the words were, but they didn't make me feel that any longer. It was a most glorious day, with a little wind, just enough to cool the air and ruffle the sea – from my window one can see straight down to the harbour. I felt so well I could have run or leapt or wrestled against the whole world. During the morning my uncle and Keramon came round. Pindar was still there and still admiring Keramon. And I thought he was quite right.

All sorts of things came into my mind at once. Theon had said I was changed. Well, so I was! And as I said that to myself it was like shifting a weight off my back. I wouldn't bother about Theon. If he chose to be serious and unsociable and look at me like a schoolmaster, let him! If he was hurt that was his own fault – I wasn't going to be tied to him. And it was all nonsense to have been frightened by Pindar and his song. It was only the sort of thing everyone says about Fortune and the Gods.

That lasted for some time. Father was quite happy about me again. I used to go rushing about with Keramon and his friends, all of us together doing all sorts of rather stupid things that seemed utterly delightful then, just because we were all doing them and all of us were so much alive and the same make of

people too, all good at doing things with our bodies and senses; it was this and not Theon's that was my real life! I was much the youngest, but they didn't seem to mind what I said or did, and there was always Keramon. Whenever I began to feel uneasy I used to look at him and it was all right.

But after a time the glitter seemed to be wearing off things. I didn't know why at first, I was quite sure I had got what I wanted, only that, as it happened, the things we were doing were less exciting than usual. But one day Mother asked me if I'd been seeing much of Theon lately. Well, I hadn't, of course, but it wasn't only that – I'd been laughing at him with the others, defending myself against ever having been in another life. I'd kept away from anywhere he was likely to be, and I know, after the first few days he'd avoided us. But I had seen him the morning before in the agora, across at the other side; he was at the tanner's, getting some mule harness, I think. I was going to the pottery at the corner with Keramon to fetch a cup he had told them to make for me; it was to have my name on it. Theon turned round and saw me and stretched out his hands towards me. And I didn't go. I waved my arm and called across to him, I don't quite remember what. I wanted to go and see my cup with dancers painted on it, and a vine, and my own name.

I remembered all that when Mother asked me about Theon. She spoke just as if things had been like they used to be; perhaps she didn't know. But anyway, her speaking like she did gave me a pain

in my mind. About an hour afterwards I knew for certain that what I wanted most in the world was Theon.

I was in my room then, sitting on my bed, thinking, and I got up and put on my thick sandals and a cloak, because it was threshing time and I thought most likely Theon would be up at the corn. Then I went out to find him. He wasn't in the city, so I took the hill road, hurrying. I didn't meet any of the others and I was glad, because they might have changed my mind. It was late in the day and very dusty; there were goats picking at the thistles in the stubble fields. I thought of Theon all the time: making pictures of him – when he saw me come, hesitating and looking at me very gravely at arm's length for a long time, and then at last smiling with mouth and eyes and saying my name with a great gasp as if he were thirsty – and then I'd have his arms round me again. As the sun went down it turned all the hanging dust over the road into a golden curtain that one had almost to push through. I stopped at the spring below his fields and drank. I asked the slaves where he was. I found him by the threshing floor, seeing that the sheaves were being spread evenly. I went up to him, but he didn't smile. It was nearly dusk, but the moon was rising over the top of the hill; one couldn't quite see it yet, but the glow was beginning. They were going to do some of the threshing by moonlight; it was cooler.

I said, 'Theon, I've come.'

He didn't turn round at once. I felt the dust in my sandals gritting between my toes. I couldn't see his face

properly in the half dark. At last he said: 'I'm busy now – you can see.'

I hadn't expected that. I said: 'But yesterday morning you wanted me!'

And he said slowly: 'I didn't think you could ever have been ungentle, Aristomenes, as you have been. Go home, oh, go back to your friends!'

'They aren't!' I said. 'Not more than you! Oh, I'm not changed!'

Then Theon turned full at me with a pitchfork in his hands. 'You are changed!' he said. 'I saw it at the feast, when Keramon sang. No one can love two people so different as him and me. You love him. Oh, I thought you were too good for it!' He stopped a moment, with his face close to mine, looking desperately sad. I didn't know what to say, I was trying not to cry myself. Then he stepped back a pace and said sharply, in a voice I'd never heard: 'Go, get off my land and never come back on it!'

He jabbed at me with the pitchfork, clumsily, because his hands were shaking. I was shaking too, but I dodged under it and caught him by the knees. I said his name over and over again. 'Theon, Theon, Theon,' I said; and I thought he must have heard how we'd laughed at him, me and the others, and I hated them and I loved him. I said so, I kept hold of him while he was trying to push me off. I was crying and shouting it; when I lifted my head for a minute, I saw the threshers in a ring behind him with the sheaves under their arms, staring, plain in the moonlight. It had risen now. But I didn't heed them or the moonshine; I

was trying to get back to Theon. He hit my fingers with the handle of the pitchfork, and his own knees as well. But I didn't care.

Not till he'd said, in that same new voice, 'I hate you; it's lies, lies, lies! I hate you!'

Then I let him go. There was nothing more to say. I went off down the hill. I turned once to look and he had one of the threshers by the hair and was hitting him.

When I got home it was very late; the porter let me in; he thought I'd been with Keramon and the others. I couldn't sleep, though, in spite of being very tired. I had to get it all clear. I knew now that I loved Theon better than anyone else there was or could be. And I thought he must be right and I couldn't love Keramon too. And I thought that if I showed him I didn't really care for anyone but him, he might understand and be my friend again.

The moon had gone round to the west and was shining into my room now. I took the cup with my name on it and threw it hard on to the floor. I didn't like doing that. Even while I threw it I was thinking what a pity it was, that the cup was a lovely thing and didn't hurt anyone itself. But I had to do it, as a sign for myself. The pieces looked small and sad in the patch of moonlight on my floor. One couldn't possibly have mended it. I saw them the next morning as soon as I woke up.

I was to have met the others early that day at the running ground, but I didn't go, and then, in the afternoon, Keramon and Deinias came to find me. When I heard them coming I nearly ran away; every moment I liked less and less the thought of what I had to do.

'Where were you?' said Keramon. 'We were afraid – we thought you might have hurt yourself. Why were you hiding at home?'

Then I said: 'I'm never going to come with you anywhere any more.'

Deinias looked quickly at Keramon, but Keramon only looked at me; he was rather white; I didn't know if he was sorry or angry. 'What do you *mean*?' he said.

I said, as loudly and clearly as I could, so that there could be no questioning: 'I mean that I can't be friends with you and Theon both. And I would rather be friends with Theon.'

Keramon said nothing for a moment, then: 'Aristomenes, you don't know what you're saying – to me!'

But Deinias broke in quickly: 'Little ungrateful fool! Don't talk to him, Keramon! Let him have his Theon, poor little thing.'

So I stamped and said, 'Deinias, out of my father's house!'

But he began to laugh, and after a minute Keramon began to laugh too; and they didn't go. I wished I'd been big enough to kill Deinias. At last he said, 'By the Lord Apollo, Kleonikos will laugh – they all will!'

And Keramon said, with his eyes narrow, 'Yes, I think we were a bit tired of the brat. Babies do get in the way.'

They turned to go out. I watched them as far as the door, then I ran after them. Keramon heard me and jumped round. I don't know what he was going to say, but I said, wanting to hurt him if I could, 'Keramon, I have broken the cup you gave me!'

He hunched himself up at once, looking almost ugly. 'Babies do break toys,' he said, and looked up at the wall on the right where my wreaths were hung. Then he spat just under the bay wreath and Deinias did the same. They couldn't dare do more.

The next morning, as I was going out, I found a blind puppy choking on the end of a string fastened to our door. I made one of the slaves cut it down and throw it on the midden. After that, I didn't think it was lucky to try and find Theon, so I stayed at home the rest of the day, pretending to Father that I was ill. The next day when I went out it was a half-fledged crow, all horrible with ants on it. The porter and one of the other boys were giggling together, so I thought they must have been bribed, but I didn't like to tell Father. I would have so hated repeating the things Keramon said. So again I pretended to be ill, and they believed me, because I wasn't used to shamming.

The third day it was a little weasel, always a baby animal; I don't think I minded that as much as they meant me to, though. God knows I was feeling old enough then! And there were such a lot of other things to mind. Father was rather worried that evening when he came in; we were having supper together. He said, 'My brother tells me there's some talk in the town of a quarrel between you and Keramon. Is that true?' So I said yes. 'What's the matter?' said Father. 'You boys! – such fools as you are over trifles.' But I said that it was so bad that I couldn't even tell him, but it wasn't all my fault. 'Shall I try and put it right?' said Father, but I begged him not to, and cried and was so miserable

that he stopped talking about it and I was very nearly really sick that night. But at least, I thought, if Father has heard about it, Theon will have heard about it too.

So the next day, in spite of the thing I found at our door, I went off to find my friend. I didn't go through the agora, because I would have been almost sure to meet one of the others. As it was, I met Kleonikos in the narrow place at the corner of Poseidon's temple, where we couldn't get out of one another's way. He nodded to me and made some joke about the new taxes – he's always good at that sort of thing – and went on in a hurry. That's all I'm likely to get from most people now, and he's decenter than the rest because he's rather older and doesn't let things get so bitter, but I expect he'd been talking to the others about me before.

Well, I went up the hill road again, past the gravestones, and on between the big stubble fields, and by and by I met Theon riding down on a mule with red tassels jigging on its bridle. He saw me and brisked the mule up to a sharp trot, but I ran in front and caught its bridle. He stayed quite still and upright, not bending over towards me at all; he wouldn't even touch my hand to take it off the bridle rein. 'Theon,' I said, 'oh Theon, I've told Keramon I was your friend, not his, and now he hates me. Isn't it all right for us?'

I was looking up at him all the time, but he wouldn't meet my eyes. There were lines round his mouth that I didn't know. He said, 'It was a pity you quarrelled with Keramon.'

And I said, 'Not if I get you back.'

But he didn't seem to hear; only after a time he said:

'It's no use trying to light ashes. You've broken something in me that I thought was sure. There's nothing to be done about it.'

The mule fidgeted with its head; I didn't dare to let go. I said: 'It was my fault, Theon. Will you forgive me? I'm very unhappy now.'

For the first time he looked down, stared at me like he used to when he was unsure of something. I thought, it's coming right!

He said: 'Oh, aren't I unhappy too!' And then suddenly he brought his stick down on the mule's flank, and it threw up its head; I wasn't holding on as tight as I had been, my hands were getting ready to take his, the rein jerked out of them.

I tried to grab the brute as it went past, but I only felt my fingers slip on its hot coat, and a drum of pebbles against my legs as its hooves took off just by me. And through the blinding, whirling dust Theon with his knees and feet in, crouched low over its neck, half-turning to catch at his red cloak that was blowing loose – but not to look back for me.

I give you back my bay wreath,
I do not want it.
Nothing is any help now.
Young as I am, I know
That the best day of my life has been and gone.
Oh, oh, Apollon!
Oh, Phoibos, I have been sore stricken
By my own pride, my own folly.
Take back your bay wreath and have pity on me!

ARROW-STRUCK

How curious it is, one goes on with things in spite of
heart-ache:
Gets up and washes, brushes teeth and hair, dresses,
Noting the feel of buttons and laces, carefully keeping
One's outside thoughts from touching the thing that
presses
So heavily on the inside – the heart ones – weighing
there, heaping,
With the grey solidity of pain. And all the time
There is the knowledge of something beautiful ended,
The white blossom of joy gone rotten and dead,
The rose-tree broken one had so carefully tended.
So that's over, one says, and looking oddly about
Sees the world still going on, posts coming and going,
Bills to be paid, newspapers to be read.
Only it means so funnily little now, knowing
What one does so dreadfully know. Is it worth driving
one's car
Safely through streets full of buses at some careful pace
With one's brakes ready to stop one from bumping
things-as-they-are,
Not all out and over some deep, desperate edge of time
and space?
How curious it is, one goes on with things in spite of
heart-ache.

THE STORY OF MYRTO

'Well, I'm sure we're very pleased to see a fresh face, all of us. You're from Corinth, aren't you? Everyone says it's such a nice place. Petalé, Petalé, come and take this lady's things to her room!

'What's your name, dear? Kalyké? And a very pretty name, I'm sure. I'm Hedylé, you know. I'm sure we shall all be such friends! Yes, I'm an Athenian – why, I was born not three streets away – so I'll be able to show you your way about. You've seen old Gruffy, of course? I hope you've made a good bargain? Well, it's never easy at first, is it. The others? Let me see, there's Petalé I just called, but she's not quite – now don't breathe a word, will you – not quite like me and you, is she? Much too much powder, doesn't she? And her figure! But there, I never was one for tittle-tattle. Only I must warn you, don't lend her anything.

'You'll soon get to know everything. My motto's "no poaching," but you're sure to make your own friends. Mine's Autokles, such a nice boy: father's a General and all that, mean old thing, I shouldn't wonder, but what I say is, a bird in the hand, don't you?

'That in the corner? Oh, that's Myrto down in the dumps as usual! Such a sweet little thing, no presence you know, but then we can't all be Helens. There's

such a funny story about her, my dear, it'll make you scream! Lord, I laughed myself silly when it all came out. "Myrto," I said, "I'll burst out of my stays laughing!" and she said – but there, I must begin at the beginning. Sit down, won't you? No one will be coming for another two hours.

'Well, it was last year, very hot it was, you remember, don't you? And so difficult to get anything. This dreadful war! But it doesn't hurt us as much as some, that's one thing. Myrto was always saving up: she wanted to start a shop. You see she hasn't got what I call her heart in her work. And a nice little penny she'd got laid by, not but what it hadn't been come by fair, with her putting her mind to it: she never was one to get so jolly she hadn't her eyes open, and the whole evening as neat and sleek and bright as a little linnet. There's some gentlemen that like that when they won't so much as look at a nice girl that's a bit of a roly-poly with plenty of pink and red and a bunch of yellow curls all round – old-fashioned, you know. Well, I'm old-fashioned myself.

'But one evening Myrto's gentleman friend sent for her out to his house: he was giving a party; Iophon, his name was. And off goes Myrto as pleased as Punch, with her hair flat down on the top, just bunched over the ears with a couple of yellow roses and parted in the middle as straight as a spear. She'd got a new yellow dress worked at the corners, and tucked up the same length all round – nothing sloppy about her in those days! – and her new slippers and the prettiest little necklace of strung rosebuds. She never wore much

jewellery out if she could help it, because, she said, if things get lost in a strange house it means such a lot of fuss and people don't like it, and besides, you never know what you mayn't get given, especially if you look as if you hadn't got much. And very sensible too! She'd got her pipes; for she doesn't play so badly, though you mightn't think it to look at her; and she was all nicely scented up. What do you use, dear? Persian lily? Mine's violet – it's got more body, so to speak. Well, anyway, as I was saying, she went out with her cloak wrapped well round her so that she shouldn't have any remarks passed in the street, and a scarf over her head, in plenty of time for the drinking – they didn't want her before that.

'I didn't see her again till morning. We'd had a bit of a night of it here and that's the truth, and I wasn't feeling quite the thing even after we'd slept it off. And my Autokles – oh, he didn't half bite my head off for waking him up with breakfast! But there, one's got to get them out of the house somehow. Well, I went downstairs and who should I see but Myrto, sitting dumped on a cushion and crying her eyes out. You know, I thought she must be a bit on too. So "Cheer up, duckie!" I said. "And we'll have a nice little something hot and freshen ourselves up." But then she turned round and I could see it wasn't that, because she was all a sort of nasty whity-green and her eyes wobbling. Then I thought one of those young devils at the party had hurt her. Very rough they are sometimes, don't think twice about slinging a girl half across the room and spraining her ankle into the bargain – yes,

and then leaving her to get home the best way she can. Oh, it's a dog's life sometimes. But there, what's the good of complaining? So I ran up to poor Myrto and felt her hands, quite cold they were. "What is it?" I said. "What is it? Never mind, we'll get even with him yet!"

'But she stopped crying and shook her head. "It's not that," she said, "oh, it's those poor men!"

' "Poor men!" I said. "I like that! Poor girls, you mean."

' "Oh no," she said, "it's the men on that island! Oh, and the poor women, the poor babies!"

'Well then, I thought again it must have been a drop too much made her like that, so I shook her and got her a bit of onion out of the kitchen. Well, then she told me. It seems there'd been a rebellion in Mitylene – of course I'd heard of it, but I hadn't thought much of it: why should I? They're always rebelling somewhere and we're always putting it down – except when we don't! That's the sort of stuff my Autokles talks, but if one goes paying attention to everything men say about wars –! Well, they'd put it down at this Mitylene place all right and there was a whole lot of prisoners over; but of course not nearly so many as were left on the island. And the thing was, what were we going to do with the island? Well, there'd been a meeting of the Assembly that day, and Kleon made a speech. Kleon? My dear, he's the cleverest man in Athens – twist us all round his little finger: oh lovely! I do like a man like that. Autokles doesn't though, nor most of one's gentlemen friends: so don't say I said so. But anyway,

the Assembly made up its mind to kill all the men at Mitylene and make slaves of their wives and children. And why not? Though I don't like having a lot of that sort of slave-girls coming into our profession, nasty, low-spirited things that won't do as they're told and bring down prices! But there it was. So they'd sent off a despatch boat that evening with the order to Mitylene, and in a day or two the Governor would be standing them all against the wall!

'But there were two or three men from Mitylene who'd come over earlier, trying to arrange about making peace. They hadn't done it, of course, or there wouldn't have been this fuss. They were out of it all themselves, but still they didn't want the rest of the place smashed, like we were going to. There'd been one of them at this supper party of Iophon's – Myrto's friend. Some of them had been laughing at him, but some of them that didn't like Kleon and always wanted to do exactly what he didn't want, were all on the man's side and said we mustn't kill the rebels. And he was crying and kicking up a fuss, and talking about getting the magistrates to call the Assembly again the next day, and getting the party bosses properly fixed so that the Decree could be changed round. Only, worse luck for him, he hadn't got half the money that was wanted for a big thing like that – no more to be got from Mitylene, of course – and no one else had all that to spare, however much of a dirty dog they said Kleon was.

'But the long and the short of it was, Myrto was just soft on this man from Mitylene. She'd never fallen for anyone before, not really, I mean, not all out as she was

then. I've been in love myself, but not this way. Poor kid, she just sat there and held on to me (not that she liked me that much, but I was the first she saw) and told me all about it. How he'd come late with no wreath, and she'd seen him from across the room and wondered who he was, and how after that she'd picked up bits of talk. Iophon wasn't doing anything either way, and "I'm done with him!" she said. "I'll never dance for him again!" And he'd been keeping her for weeks! Well, after a bit they were very merry at the party, and singing and drinking and throwing cushions about, all except this man. He was going from one to another asking them to help. Some said they would, but not till next day, and some said he'd better drink and forget all about it. Which is always the best way out of everything. But he wouldn't. And by and by, when everyone was cheery and settled down with their girl-friends and boy-friends, or else gone home, Myrto began to fall for him badly. She was doing her job with Iophon, of course, for she was never one to shirk it, not when she'd been paid. But then Iophon was sick, and then he fell asleep, and she got her hair out from under his shoulders, bit by bit – you know – and she picked herself up and did up her dress, and then she went tip-toeing over to the man from Mitylene, who was sitting there like an image and picking his garland to bits. She sat down beside him. He wouldn't have anything to do with her, not at first, shoved her off. But she knew what she wanted by now, and it made her clever, so after a bit he began to talk.

'By the time she'd told me all this she'd cried herself

sick and silly; I took her upstairs to lie down. Old Gruffy doesn't like seeing anyone upset in the downstairs rooms. Remember that, my dear, if you ever feel like having a good cry! When I got her up she told about this Mitylene affair, how the rebels were all to be killed, you know, and a clean sweep made of the place. She took on so, you'd have thought it was her own brothers and sisters, instead of this man's, that she'd only set eyes on for the first time that night! Why, it was almost like she was seeing them. She sat on the bed with her hair all in tags and tails – she, who was always so neat and tidy – with her arms stretched out, and staring, the way you'd think it was her mother's ghost come in. And, "Oh, these poor people," she says. "I can't bear it!" "But bear it you must," I says, "for there's nothing else to be done. And aren't you ashamed of yourself, Myrto," I says, "to take on like this over a lot of nasty rebels? Haven't we got enough to do being sorry for ourselves?" For you know, dear, there's moments one gets tired of it all, and that's a fact.

'So Myrto got quiet again after a bit and looked at herself in the mirror and said she'd best tidy up. And I wasn't wanting to stay, not with her in that silly state, and a nasty dry mouth of my own, so I thought she could take care of herself and went off and sewed up the hem of my best dress that some great toad had trodden in and torn right along. Then I had my forty winks in the afternoon – I always depend on that and I don't let a soul disturb me, not if the house was burning down! Well, then it was time for visitors, so I smartened myself up and came down. Two or three gentlemen came

in, and the rest of the girls, but no Myrto. Still, I didn't think twice about it; she looked like having a nice headache when I left, and anyway it was no affair of mine.

'By and by, she came scurrying in, all blowzy with running, and her out-of-door things on. Gruffy was as cross as two sticks, for it doesn't do – does it now? – to have girls running in and out of the place as if there wasn't any order or comfort: it doesn't look quite the thing. As she went by, she pinched my arm and said, "The Assembly's met!" But I was busy making myself agreeable to the gentlemen, and I couldn't for the life of me think what she meant, nor put two and two together. Well, after that she took her cloak off and was very pleasant to everyone but seemed somehow in a state, almost as if she'd been drinking a little – and I'd have been the last to blame her, I would indeed! Towards dusk some more gentlemen came, very nice and free-handed they were, and Myrto runs along and starts making up to them like a fresh kid. By and by, I heard her asking about what had happened at the Assembly. Of course they laughed at her, because it does seem silly to have a girl shove her nose into that sort of thing, but after a bit they did begin talking about it to one another, saying how near the voting had gone and all that. Then it came out that the other side had won in spite of Kleon, and they'd sent off a second boat after the first to say that the rebels weren't to be killed after all. The gentlemen thought it a pity not to have the creatures killed, but still they weren't voting for Kleon and his dirty working people anyway, and they had a

bet about which ship would get in first. Of course, if the second didn't, that would be the last of the rebels, whatever the Assembly had made up its mind to do!

'Myrto heard it all too, and she went red and white by turns like a peep-show – she did really! – and began acting quite silly with the gentlemen, till you'd have thought it was her first day. Everyone was staring at her, and she looked a sight, with her hair coming down and her dress all twisted crooked where one of them had given it a pull, laughing out loud with her mouth open and throwing herself about, and just at the beginning of the evening too! Well, I mean the rest of us girls were quite surprised and disgusted, you'd never have thought this was one of the nicest-spoken, most respectable houses in Athens! I didn't speak a word to her till the evening of the next day, and then it was to say that I did hope and trust she wasn't going to behave that way again. I knew my Autokles was coming, and I didn't want to feel ashamed of the house. Besides, one never knows – some men do like that kind of silly game! And one doesn't want all one's trouble wasted, does one? But she'd got quite ladylike by then. All she said was, "I wonder how long those boats take."

'So I said, "You aren't still on that, are you? Why, whatever has come over you?" And I said, "If it's like that, why doesn't that new gentleman friend of yours come round and see you?"

'And she said, "He doesn't know where I am."

'And I said, "He can ask Iophon, can't he?"

'But Myrto said, "He won't."

'Well, the next day she was fussing worse, because by

that time whatever was going to happen to those rebels of hers had. And really it was too bad, because we were having a party with dancing and she and I were doing one together – such a pretty thing, you must see me do it one day – but not a bit of trouble would she take, just slopping through it like a great sheep, and, of course, it didn't get past! My dear, I gave her the rough side of my tongue after that, poor thing, I did really; but she went sniffling off without a word, and what I say is, what's the good of two ladies having an argument if one has to do all the talking oneself?

'It must have been two days after, and Myrto going about as white as a ghost, till we were all wondering if there wasn't really something the matter after all; and her Iophon and my Autokles came in together, both of them just a bit on. Up comes Iophon, frowning like a great pig, and gives her a pinch and says: "What's all this about your going visiting?"

'And she says, "Whatever are you talking about?"

'And he says, "You've been seeing that dirty little rat from Mitylene."

'And she stamps and says, "Who told you that, Mr. Clever?"

'But I don't like scenes – things do get broken so – so I says, "Well, as if we didn't all know she wouldn't look at a soul when you're not there!" and I pulled his garland straight, and I got him not to be silly, and she held her tongue. After a bit he began to grumble to Autokles about this man from Mitylene, how he wasn't going to have him in his house again, and how the man was going about now saying how he'd squared the

magistrates and got the second decree through, and what a shame it was anyway. But Autokles wasn't listening much. He was trying to write me a poem; he always does, you know, when he isn't quite the thing. I use them for curl papers. So I asked what it was all about. I didn't want Myrto to go asking in her silly way and perhaps get him on the wrong side again. He said the second boat had rowed all night – these Mitylene people in Athens had spent the last of their money on extra food and drink for the rowers! – and it just hadn't caught up the first. The Governor was there reading the Orders, he said, and in another ten minutes he'd have got on to the job, when the second lot came: a bit of a close call! While he was talking I'd got the corner of my eye on Myrto. He wasn't looking at her face, just messing about with her, you know. And she was letting him, but she'd got all fixed and staring and queer; it gave me quite a turn. And when she heard all this she got very red and soft-looking and her eyes came all over funny, and she laughed at the back of her throat.

'I asked her that night if she hadn't been seeing the man from Mitylene, and she said yes. And I said it was a shame when poor Iophon was such a nice man and gave her presents. But she wouldn't say a thing more. Nasty close little cat she can be if she likes! But she wasn't silly again for quite a long time, though she wasn't quite herself either. But there, one can't spend all one's time fussing after another girl!

'But anyway it was about a month later, the best part of a month – I'm not tiring you, am I, dear? You'll laugh when you hear – and one evening we were going

to have a special party. The day before I said to Myrto, "What are you going to wear, dear, because I'm sick and tired of your old red that you're always getting done up, I am indeed!"

'And she said, "Well, I did think of wearing it with the shawl off the green and my new slippers."

'So I said, "Well, you are a stingy fish, Myrto! I suppose you'll have on your gold and corals anyway?"

'And she said, "I didn't think so. It seems such a waste: none of the gentlemen really notice what one wears so long as one doesn't wear too much."

'So I said, "Yes, of course I know it's personality that counts, but we girls are tired of having to look at the same old things every time, so I tell you straight!"

'And she said, very jumpy, "Oh Hedylé, my things do always get lost and torn so at these parties!" And then she began to cry.

'So I said, pretty sharp, "You pull yourself together, my girl, and listen to me. You've just got to get yourself a new dress before to-morrow, so out you go this minute and buy a real nice bit of stuff. Because if you don't we'll set old Gruff on you!"

'And then she gave a sort of a nasty screech and said, "Oh, I can't!"

'And I said, "Well, why not, I should like to know? It's high time you take some money out of your blessed shop, because it's that you're thinking of, and behave decent by the rest of us!"

'And then she said, "But I haven't got the money at all! Strike me dead if I have!"

'You could have knocked me down with a feather.

"You haven't!" I said. "Then where is it? You don't mean to tell me it's been and gone and got stolen?"

'But she stuck her head down. "It's not," she said. And then I had to shake her – I had truly – to get the next thing out. You'll never guess. She'd actually gone and taken it all, every penny, and her gold and corals too, every brooch and ring that she wasn't wearing every day, to that Mitylene man to help him square the bosses and get the Assembly called! "And he did say," said Myrto, "that he was going to pay me back in a week, but he hasn't."

' "Well, whatever do you expect!" I said, and then I just couldn't help it, I'd have burst myself if I hadn't laughed!

' "I went round there afterwards, two or three times," said Myrto, "and he was so nice! And I was so sorry for his friends and so glad when it all got right! And he said I was like coming on a spring of water in August, he did really. But now I can't find him, nor nothing about him. I think he's left Athens."

' "I should say he had!" I said, as well as I could for laughing. "How could you be so soft, Myrto! You'll never see that nice gentleman again!"

'And she says, "I expect he'd spent all his money helping his friends, and he couldn't get any more, and he was ashamed to tell me so."

'And I says, "Ashamed! All he's ashamed of is taking money from poor tarts like us. You bet he's kept enough not to break up his own happy home!"

'And she says, "I don't think he really had much more. And it's not very nice in Mitylene now, because

we've broken down their walls and divided up the land among ourselves; though it's better for them than being killed. But even if it's not nice I expect he's gone back."

'And I says, "There you are again, Myrto, you and your rebels! Haven't you had enough of them yet, getting done in the eye like this! But let this be a lesson to you, my girl, for you won't see that money of yours again, not if you live to be a hundred!"

'And she just says "No," so silly and blank it made me tired. But there, poor thing, that was the last she heard of man or money! It just shows what a girl can do if she gets silly on a man. Lord, she was properly landed! Well, I've got a tender heart myself, but it doesn't go off pop like that. Nor hers won't again in a hurry either! You just try teasing her about it one day, her and her money; you'll see how she scratches at you. Make you scream with laughing, she will! But there, she knows we girls don't mean any harm.

'Well, dear, you'll be wanting to go up and dress, though we don't expect any visitors yet. Shall I come and help you unpack? Always so tiring after a long journey, isn't it? There's no one in Athens knows the fashions better than me, though I say it as shouldn't. I'm sure you've got some pretty things laid by, I can see you've got taste, dear, like me, so important, I always say; but that little rose-tree pattern you've got on, why, it hasn't been worn for more than a year! You don't mind me telling you, dear, do you? Ask any of the girls if it isn't true. But I'll tell you what I'll do, dear, I'll buy it off you – it's just what I could do with to make up

for my new underskirt. Or you could have one of mine instead, there's a smart grass-green I've got, it would go with your complexion. Come along, dear, I'll show it you.

'Gracious, there's Myrto in the corner still! Did you ever see such a one for sitting still and doing nothing! Poor little thing, we ought to rouse her, really and truly we ought, or she'll be as white as a flounder to-night, and old Gruffy'll lay into her as like as not. Myrto, Myrto dear, here's a new lady called Kalyké come all the way from Corinth! She did laugh, proper, when I told her about you!

This is the hour he does not know
    Yet his mind knows,
Aware a whole life long, although
    He so blindfold
Had not seen what at farthest look,
    Surely, it saw.
For now it whispers, murmurs like a cold book
    The way fitly
To bear the hour that has come,
    As men before him
Have borne bravely its like, and some
    With rarest fortune
Have yet found strange bliss
    In pain to strength turning.
He dares not hope for this.
    Better for him to learn now
To stay calm under pain,
    When, looking forward, nothing
Seems worth labour again:
    Aye, to be glad when another
Takes up the joys he once had: to wait,
    To remember sweetly
Things now bitter: let no love turn hate:
    But allow the fleeting
Thin hours to sweep his heart.
    So in the end he shall go slowly
To a high place apart,
    And stand upright and clean, not knowing
Whether old scars still smart.

BABES IN THE WOOD

KONNOS and Philinna were twins. They had been born during the war and they looked it. Almost all their lives they had been cooped up with their father and big sisters and a family of older cousins that they rather hated, in a four-roomed house in a back street of Athens; and very often there wasn't much to eat and what there was seemed rather nasty. But twice they had been to the country, to their grandfather's farm, Red Knob, up under the hills Acharnæ-way. Between times, in the city where there wasn't room to play properly, they used to talk about it and make up stories about next time they were going back. Grandfather used to grumble a great deal, even at his nice farm with all the animals. He took the twins round, one holding on at each side, and showed them the stumps of the olives and fruit trees with the funny, lopsided shoots straggling out of them, and told how the wicked Spartans had come – a long time ago, before the twins were born, when even their biggest sister had been quite a little baby – and cut down all the lovely things that his father's father had planted and he had tended for his own children and grandchildren, the beautiful strong olives from the terraces of hoed earth, and the apple trees round the house. They had hacked the vine

stocks too, but they had got well again or new ones had been planted and were fruiting as happily as ever; but olives take half a man's lifetime before they bear and the ones that had been cut would never get well again and there was no olive harvest at Red Knob now. So whenever Konnos and Philinna saw olive trees they were to remember and hate the Spartans. That was what grandfather said.

They were to have gone to Red Knob this summer, and they'd planned making a swing and all the things they were going to have to eat. But then at the end of the winter, grandfather died quite suddenly and father's eldest brother, the uncle they were really frightened of, went to the farm with his wife and children, and somehow there didn't seem to be room for them and father. So for weeks after that father was worried and cross and they had to keep very quiet when he came in. He was having to decide about something very important; at last he did.

Now they were on a ship. They had been on board for five days and it had stopped being new and frightening and delightful and a thing in itself, and had become nothing but what it was to the grown-ups; a means to an end. She was a broad, slow ship with a square sail and red, sticking-out eyes to right and left of the prow and only a dozen oars on each side. There were three other red or blue-eyed ships just like her within hail, and four lovely, slim war-ships cruising round and protecting them. But they had Gods on board too, for still other protection, because they were going away from Athens and the cousins and the stuffy

house, going to find home and peace, and never, never coming back.

There was a pile of sacks against the sail with rustling, tickling seed-corn that they felt shifting fatly under them as they lay on their fronts looking ahead and to the left, wondering if that were really Melos in sight at last. 'I think so,' said Konnos, 'look at the others. Look at father!' They turned their eyes to the deck. The grown-ups were pointing too.

'What a dark, lumpy island it is,' said Philinna after a bit. 'I did think it would be flatter.'

'It's our island!' said Konnos proudly. It was lovely to be coming like this as conquerors, as real kings of the castle!

'I wonder what our house is going to be like,' Philinna said for the hundredth time, but a little more anxiously now. She would know quite soon and then that would be the end of all their stories. 'I wonder if it will be far up the hills.'

'Father said it would be smaller than Red Knob, but better land perhaps, and trees.'

'Will there be olives?'

'Oh yes! Like the olives at Red Knob before the war, like grandfather used to tell us about.'

'Like Our Lady's olive.'

'Well, not so big as that, Phil'a; that's the first olive in the whole world. But we shall have lots of oil; we shall have a lamp to go to bed in the winter.'

'Oh, shall we?'

'Well, I think so. Boys did before the war.'

'And girls?'

'Oh, Phil'a, you are a silly! Nurse says there'll be ewes and she'll make us cream cheese like people used to have.'

'I shall have a lamb for my very own; I'll tie a bell round his neck. Will we be old enough to tread the grapes this year?'

'Oh yes, we shall be able to do lots of things. We'll make Sostraté let us. I'm glad Lysilla's married and left behind. Sostraté's much easier to manage. Sisters are a nuisance.' Philinna made a face and wriggled round on the sack and half sat up. But Konnos pulled her down again: 'I didn't mean you, goose-Phil'a! You know I don't. But Sostraté's got to see we're big enough to do things on our own. I expect she'll have one or two slaves to help her, and then she'll be able to be cross to them.'

'Do you think they'll be as nice as Skeblyas at Red Knob? Do you remember him helping us with our house? I do wish Uncle hadn't got him now.'

'Well, they won't be grown-up men. We killed all the grown-up Melians.'

Philinna wriggled again, looking from her brother to the island that was getting bigger and plainer already, and whispered: 'Do you think they're all safe buried, Konnylé? I don't like going to a place where everyone's killed!'

'But they had to be killed,' said Konnos, 'they're the same as Spartans really.'

Here, one of the sailors began putting away their sacks, getting them into the bows for unloading. And Sostraté, the fifteen-year-old sister, came up, dreadfully

worried, to collect them and have everything ready. It would be another hour before they were in, but she was jumpy about it already and slapped the twins for laughing at her: not that it hurt them at all. She had so hated it all, the discomfort and disorder of everything and this continual business of threatening the children with smackings that she knew, and they knew, she wasn't strong enough to do any good with! Father expected her to do all a grown-up house-wife would have done for him, push about among the men and see to the food and the baggage and everything. And she just couldn't! She'd lain awake for hours every night trembling and crying because she was so bad at it, and nobody ever said thank you to her, and Lysilla was married and left behind at Athens and perhaps they'd never see one another any more. Old nurse was too shaky now to be much good on the ship; she couldn't bustle about and do things like she used; she got pains in her side and went all funny. But she did manage to keep father in a better temper, and when they were settled down again and hadn't got to be in such a hurry every minute, she'd be splendid. But in the meantime poor Sostraté had got the unlading to go through and the move into a strange house with father expecting everything to be just so at once, and new slaves to manage who wouldn't be respectful! Oh, if only the twins would be obedient for a little!

The new farm was very lonely, quite high up, with steep valley walls and standing-out rocks and prickly bushes at two sides and a stream at the bottom of the kitchen garden; it looked as though it would go dry

in the very hot weather, but there was a well. She didn't like the look of the water very much, though; there were things bobbing about in it and a nasty butchery sort of smell. The house was built against the slope, so that there were two stories in front. The living-room and men's rooms were below, and above were the store rooms with shelves all round, and rooms for Sostraté and the twins, as well as Nurse and any women slaves father chose to get to help them. There was a ladder in the twins' room and a trap door in the roof, which was stiff to open at first; when you got up it was flat, with drying poles and remains of rope, and the frame of an old bed that had been left there. Not only that, but at the back you could jump off on to the hill-side, quite an easy jump because of the slope, and there were bushes, not prickly ones, to land on. Downstairs the nicest room was the big kitchen with the fireplace and windows looking two ways, down the valley and across it.

Very soon after they moved in father went down to the market and bought all that they needed for the farm. Of course, he had brought a lot of things with him, the things grandfather had left him, mostly; a plow and seed-corn, his ox-yoke and harness, a pick and spades and rope, besides tubs and knives and nails and all that sort of thing. But he had taken no live stock except a couple of ducks. However, all the colonists had been promised enough to start with; there was everything that had been collected from all over the island after the last fighting ready for them to choose from, and a government official to stop them

quarrelling over it. Father came back with four goats, a ewe with lambs, a dear little sucking pig to feed up, a yoke of oxen, rather scraggy, a very stupid-looking, cheap Thracian boy who was carrying the pig, and a Melian girl to help Sostraté about the house. The Melian girl was called Eripha. She slept in the back room of the top part of the house where the stores were, but she knew Sostraté would have her whipped if she found any of them missing, so that was all right.

By and by, Philinna, rather troubled, asked Nurse – because somehow it didn't seem the sort of question one could ask Sostraté, and Konnos wouldn't know – why she had heard father in the store room when she woke up in the middle of the night; three times it had been, and he seemed to be talking to Eripha in a funny voice. Nurse shut her up with 'Them as asks no questions –' But she looked uncomfortable and very cross, though not really with Philinna. Sostraté seemed to be more worried than ever, too. She didn't seem to want to speak to Eripha and if there were any orders for her she sent them by one of the twins. And Eripha herself began to be cheeky and answer back, which she never had to begin with. And one day there was a horrid fuss and the twins didn't get dinner properly. Eripha had on a necklace under her dress, but it showed at the back and Sostraté saw it and screamed at her that she had stolen it, because it was mother's, and Nurse came up and screamed too and said, 'We've caught you this time,' and they sent Konnos for the boy to come and whip Eripha. And then father came in and lost his temper too, and the twins ran away into

the wood, but Eripha wasn't whipped and she kept the necklace and wore it over her dress, and Sostraté cried and said she wanted to go away and why wouldn't father do something about getting her married!

So one day Konnos and Philinna went right up into the wood, further than they'd ever been before, and they had some bread and cheese with them, and it got very rocky and steep and Philinna stubbed her toe and began to cry, but she didn't want to go home. They went along and they went along and by and by the side of the hill where there was a sort of path stopped suddenly and there was a slice out of the cliff as if a giant had cut it with his knife, and they looked down and there were twisty trees growing out of the cracks, and some red flowers with flies on them, and stiff thorny creepers pulling themselves along between the trees. Right at the bottom they could see water, but they couldn't hear it, so it must have been some pools left over from winter. The sun came straight down on to the top of everything and the leaves were all dried up and dusty. There was no wind at all and nothing moving except the flies.

At first they thought the path had quite ended, and then they saw it went round a big rock with jutting bits on it that they could hold by. Sometimes the path was quite narrow and hollowed out a little in the whitish gritty rock, as if goats often went along it. If you looked down, there were tops of trees and the rock going steep to the bottom with crooked narrow ledges on it, not big enough to stop you if you tumbled. Their hands were scratched with holding on to bits of stone

and cutting grass and prickles, and they were both thirsty, but neither of them said anything about going back, because it was nicer to be hot and sore and sticky on the edge of a cliff with only each other, than to be at home with everyone being nasty to everyone else, so that they didn't know where to go: Sostraté crying and Nurse cross and Eripha just horrid and the Thracian boy too stupid to talk to anyone except the pig and father scolding everyone the moment he came into the room in case they said something first!

By and by the path widened to a little ledge with dry cropped herbs on it and they stopped and looked over the edge. They could not see any water now and between the prickle bushes the bare rocks quivered as if one had been staring through the top of a fire. Suddenly Philinna began to cry again. 'I don't like being here!' she said, 'I thought it was going to be like Red Knob, only nicer, and it isn't. What makes it so horrid?'

Konnos was wriggling his hard bare heel along in the dust. 'We don't see anyone,' he said, 'and father's got so funny.' He pulled her close over to him and whispered: 'We don't like it because it doesn't like us. I expect there are witches here.'

'Oh,' said Philinna, 'do you think Eripha is a witch? Has she put a spell on father and everyone?'

Konnos frowned, considering; in some muddled, unhappy bit of him he felt that about father, anyway, it was nothing so simple as bewitchment. 'I don't know,' he said, 'only the hills here look as if they wanted to eat us up. I don't like Melos any more than you do!'

Both of them were looking at the far end of the ledge, as if something dreadful was going to come round the corner. But they didn't quite think it would really, so, when something did come, they both squealed just a little and cowered like two birds. But it was only a boy. He was rather older than them and had been stronger. He had no clothes and his hair was in mats and tag-ends and his eyes looked too big for his face, and after a bit you saw that he was amazingly thin so that all his ribs stuck out, and the joints of his arms and leg bones. He was just as frightened as the twins. Philinna thought for a moment he was going to jump over the edge and she would hear him scream. But when he didn't the twins began to be brave first and went on a few steps. 'Who are you?' said Konnos, and 'Are you a real boy?' said Philinna, staring at his queer, starved, knotted body, which might easily have grown up into an ogre's. But the boy wasn't looking at her, not at her face anyhow – at her hands. 'Oh,' she said to her brother, 'oh Konnylé, please let's give it him!' And she held out the crusty end of a brown loaf with a piece of ewe cheese, rather crumbled, stuck into it.

Before she could have had time to draw her hand back, if she had wanted to, the boy was on to it, snatching up the food from fingers to mouth. Philinna stood shaking, and the last crumbs of the bread fell off her hand. 'Artemis apotropaia!' she said, 'Are you a wolf?' And Konnos, rather white, had a stone in his hand for some sort of weapon at least.

The boy swallowed down the last bit of bread, choking a little; his starved body was like a flame that

could be blown about by anything, his breathing, his heart beating, the suddenly eaten food. He said, 'You're enemies – if you've got bread.'

Philinna cried: 'That was all I had.'

The scarred, naked boy went on: 'But before that, you came from Athens – Athens that's a devil, eating people!'

'No!' said Philinna, 'Athens was nice; it's Our Lady's town. Only *we* didn't get enough to eat there always. And there aren't any devils in Athens. They're in Sparta. And here – are you quite sure you're a real boy?'

He stared at her, licking round his mouth for crumbs. Konnos pulled at her arm: 'Let's go back!' he said in a half-whisper, 'Don't you see, Phil'a, he's a Melian, and he hasn't been killed yet!'

The twins began to go back towards the narrow end of the ledge they had come from, step by step, still looking at the boy who ought to have been dead and wasn't. Suddenly he called to them, ran a yard or two towards them: 'Is there any more food?'

The twins stopped and looked at each other. They didn't like his voice because it was like Eripha's. But they were partly sorry for him and partly frightened. 'Here!' said Konnos, and took his bread and cheese out from the fold of his tunic; it was rather warm and grubby.

The boy took it and said, 'I'm hungry all the time. Can't you let me have some more to eat soon?'

'I don't know,' said Konnos. 'What's your name?'

But Philinna cried out at once: 'I don't want his

name – it's not lucky! Even if he is real. Boy, we'll call you something ourselves, we'll call you – oh, Skinny! You are, you see. And we're the Twins-at-the-Farm. And we'll give you things to eat if you're nice. We're eleven. How old are you?'

'I used to be twelve,' said the boy slowly, 'but now I don't count years. Would you like to come to the cave?'

'No!' said Philinna, but she began to go near the boy, pulling at the ends of her hair as she always did when she was very wildly excited over one of Nurse's stories.

And Konnos said quickly: 'I'm not afraid. He's only a Melian!' And he got in front of her and touched Skinny. He was quite warm anyhow, and he had real skin on his arms, only it was rather dry and loose.

So they went along and they went along and no one said anything and the rocks at the other side got nearer and nearer and they came to a place where the water dripped slowly into a pool and they all drank, though it was warmish and tasted of dead leaves, and by and by they came to the mouth of a deep dark cave. Two old women were sitting at the mouth of the cave; one of them was spinning and the other just sat with her hands spread on her knees and the side of her mouth running. When the children came round the corner the first old woman screeched and spat and ran into the cave, but the other one still sat on and turned blurred eyes on to them. 'They *are* witches,' said Philinna, 'I knew.'

Then Konnos jumped at the Melian boy and began

hitting him with the stone he had kept in his hand all the time. And instead of hitting him back and knocking him over, as he ought to have, the boy plumped down on his knees and howled. Konnos stopped. 'Athena Niké!' he shouted, and tossed the stone up into the sun and caught it again.

Philinna went over to the boy. 'Get up, Skinny,' she said, 'and don't be silly. What's in the cave?'

'They are,' he said.

'Who?'

The second old woman began beckoning them with both hands and nodding and jumping her ragged and dreadful body about. 'Come in!' she cried to them, 'come in, my pretty dears! There's gold and jewels and honey-cakes . . .' Her voice trailed off into faint gigglings.

Philinna caught hold of the boy. 'I'll look in,' she said, 'but I won't *go* in. And you must come too.'

Konnos held her other hand; they kept well off the witch's shadow; they looked into the cave. 'I don't see any gold,' said Konnos.

And Philinna said: 'What's that funny smell? It's sweet and makes me want to be sick. What is it, Skinny?'

'It's only them,' he said in a tired voice, 'you'd better not come in. There isn't any gold really. She usedn't to be a witch.'

They backed out, twiching their nostrils to get rid of the horrid smell. The old witch was half asleep. 'Why did you bring us?' said Philinna.

'I wanted you to give me more to eat,' said the boy,

'and the cave is all I've got. Twins-at-the-Farm, will you give me bread again and cooked meat sometimes? Shall I come for it? At night? It's Frog's Farm, isn't it?'

Konnos got red: 'It isn't now! That's what Eripha used to call it till we made her stop! It's father's farm now, New Red Knob! And you're not to call it anything else, Skinny! But we'll feed you all right. You must wait in the bushes at the back and not come any nearer. You can come to-morrow night but you aren't to come before. And sister and I are going home!'

They went back along the narrow path. For a little way Skinny followed them, though they shouted to him not to; then they threw stones at him and he went back. They were very hungry before they got home, because the boy had eaten all their bread and cheese and nowadays they weren't so used to being hungry. They got very cross with one another, and when they came in they went and ate the hot pie that Eripha had made for father's supper and didn't say anything about it, so when father came back and there wasn't a hot pie he pulled Eripha's hair and hit her with a spade, so it looked as if she couldn't have bewitched him very well. That evening after they were in bed they got Nurse to tell them the story of Theseus, who went along a very narrow, very crooked path between very steep rocks, and killed the Minotaur with the dreadful horns that he used to spike through little boys and girls from Athens. But Theseus cut off his head and killed him so that he never came alive again.

The night after, Skinny came for food. They'd saved him bread and cabbage and half a salt fish. Both

of them climbed out on to the roof without making a noise, and sat at the back with their legs dangling over and talked to him while he ate most of the stuff and put the rest into a rush basket. He seemed more like a real boy in the dark and they talked about ordinary things like animals and games. Skinny seemed to like that. When they got sleepy they told him to go away and went back to their room and shut the trap door. They heard father in with Eripha again and made a special face at one another about it.

Every two or three nights after that they fed Skinny. It was fun getting out on to the roof and knowing how cross Nurse and Sostraté would be if they found out. They could usually find him an egg because it was they who collected the eggs every morning, and of course, if one doesn't like the cook there is nothing so delightful as larder raiding. They weren't at all frightened of Skinny now; he was just ordinary like everyone else. One day Konnos asked father what a sweet dull smell like that could be, and father said: 'It sounds like after the battle!' But Konnos didn't tell Philinna that, because he still didn't quite understand what it meant.

Now that they were all settled down, the twins couldn't run away and do things together as easily as they used. Konnos was big enough to help about the farm and much cleverer than the Thracian boy of course. At first the farm had been all in a mess and they had to get it straight and build up the terraces again and summer-prune the vines, and then there was hay to be gathered and stacked for the beasts. Philinna

had to learn how to milk the ewes and make cheese, as well as staying indoors a lot of the time, spinning and weaving and being taught about medicines by Nurse. Father promised Sostraté he would look out for a husband for her and sometimes she went down to market with him. Once he had taken Eripha down and bought her a pair of ear-rings, so Sostraté made him buy her a pair too. They were pretty ones with striped glass beads dangling from them. Philinna liked to touch them and make them jingle tinily against her sister's cheek. Of course there were better ones at Athens; Sostraté used to talk about the jeweller's shop at the corner by the fountain: she remembered the things on the trays as well as if she were looking at them; when she talked like that, Philinna could see the corner too and the sun on the wall and the clever lizards running along it and the water splashing into the pitchers and her two big sisters answering back at the boys, and how you could see past the crook in the street up to the Acropolis and Our Lady's house all straight and golden and lovely, like something just come down from the sky.

One night Konnos said suddenly: 'How much longer are we to go on feeding you, Skinny?'

And Philinna kicked her feet about and said: 'Why don't you bring us some gold and silver out of the witches' cave?'

'But there isn't any,' said the boy, 'I told you. That's not what it's for.'

'What is it for then?'

Skinny came close to the back wall of the house and

looked up at them: 'If you swear never to tell anyone you shall come to the cave to-night and see!' He seemed terribly excited, panting, and yet speaking quite low still. 'It's all I can give you,' he said, 'all I can pay you for the food, is the sight of the hidden things to-night!'

'Is it a secret?' said Philinna, 'really and truly a secret?'

And Skinny said: 'It is a God you don't know about, the God who is left us.'

She and Konnos looked at one another. She said: 'We aren't allowed.'

And Konnos said: 'We're old enough to do things and Sostraté is a silly!'

So they both said: 'We'll come!' and they jumped off the roof into the bushes behind.

Skinny led the way, trotting very fast so that they could only just keep up with him. In the dark the brambles tripped them and the big dry thistles scratched their hands. But before they got to the narrow path the moon had risen, nearly full, and they could see passably. On the broad ledge, half-way along, they stopped for a moment and sat on the ground and both the twins went half to sleep, so that when Skinny shook them and pulled them up they were still yawning and blinking, and their heads ached with feeling so much too heavy for their necks, and funny clouds and pictures seemed to go across their eyes and minds, dreams that wanted to come to them, and there began to be a sort of dream pattern about the whole night.

So they went along and they went along and they

came to the place where the rocks closed in and there was no moonlight, and then they came to the flat place outside the cave. Here the moonlight came again, and it shone on a stone in the middle which certainly had not been there before; it was difficult to see just what the marks were on the stone, but they made something like a coiled-up snake. Skinny came behind them and said: 'This is the beginning of the sacred place. Take your oath never to tell.' And he pushed them over towards the stone. Philinna began to cry. 'Whose name must we take?' whispered Konnos; half of him was tremendously excited at going to take an oath like a grown man. 'No name, no name,' said Skinny, panting, '– the Snake out of the Stone!' So they put their hands on to the stone and gave the oath never to tell. And the dream went on.

Skinny held on to Konnos and Konnos held on to Philinna and they went through the mouth of the cave, and as they went past the narrowest part drops of something cold spattered their faces. The smell was thick and dreadful, but further in it was drowned by a drifting smoke that made their eyes smart. They walked on tiptoe along a ledge round the side of the cave, feeling their way. There were two or three baskets of burning twigs slung from the roof, but they did not give much light, only made the dark fuller of jumping shadows. They were passing other people, but no one spoke except in very faint whispers. Once or twice they had to squeeze past the back of someone standing close to the cave wall, and once an end of hair brushed against Philinna's face and she thought it

must have been a witch's because she could feel a prickling where it had been on her cheek for an hour afterwards. By and by, they came to a narrow seat cut in the rock and all squeezed up on to it; it was damp and cold to sit on, but the air was getting hot with the smoke from the juniper twigs. They had lighted more baskets now, and torches along the wall, and in a little a sort of shuddering went through everyone and they began to wail, low and very sadly. There was an altar in the middle of the cave with a red charcoal fire smouldering or just flaming on it; it had the snake mark carved on it too, and there were branches heaped all round it, laurel and oak and olive, and bryony thick with berries.

The children's eyes began to get used to the smoky light and to see the worshippers, women and children and a few men, mostly thin and ill and ragged-looking, except for some of the younger women. Suddenly the twins pinched one another and both looked the same way, because they had seen Eripha at one side. She did not see them, because, like the rest, she was looking towards the altar, very fixedly, and besides, they were in deep shadow. She was not wearing her new earrings or the necklace there had been such a fuss about, and her face was quite quiet, which it hardly ever was at home. The shuddering wail went to and fro across the cave like waves, getting a little louder every time. Philinna whispered to Konnos with her mouth very close to his ear: 'Who are they all?' And Konnos whispered back: 'They're the castle we're kings of Phil'a; think hard about Athens!' So they both did.

The people began to get more and more excited; they twitched with their hands and stamped with their feet in time to the wailing. Then the crowd heaved about and squeezed itself together to make a path from the innermost end of the cave to the space round the altar. Women and old men with garlands of bryony and either black clothes or strips and rags of black over their ordinary dresses, came through carrying things on baskets between them. There was a very big club with spikes in it and a drinking-horn that father, say, could only just have lifted, and a great shield, higher than a man, that they rolled along between them, and folds on folds of a huge cloak, and at last a dreadful mask of a frowning giant made of wood painted red and brown and white, with shining open eyes of shell and dark scarlet bars of criss-cross on his cheeks. These things were put in a ring round the altar, and one by one people came out from the crowd and threw oil or butter on to the altar fire so that it flared and sputtered yellow for a moment. Eripha did this, and the twins thought it must be the ewe butter that Nurse made at the farm.

Then, while the flame was still bright, everyone's eyes seemed to turn one way and there came in three men, naked, with white fluttering short cloaks tied over their shoulders by cords, and each of them was leading a piebald goat. They began jumping round and round the altar, rocking from one foot to the other. They were the only at all young men the children had seen there, and one of them was a slave because he had an iron ring on his neck that jarred and thudded down at every

leap, so that before the end there was a raw bleeding place over his collar-bone at each side, and one of them jumped very queerly, all on one side, and every now and then he put his hand to his head as if he were steadying himself, and all had newish scars on their bodies. They went on leaping and crying out for a long time, and the unblinking wooden face of the giant went on looking at them, and the children grew dazed with the beating of feet and flapping of cloaks and the singing of the crowd who had now some form of words they were saying over and over, and the dimming and flickering of the yellow flame; and their own bodies got stiff and chittering and they began to know that whatever was happening in the cave was against them and against Athens.

Suddenly leaping and singing came to an end. The whole place hushed down as if a cloak had been dropped on to it. Everyone was holding out hands towards the altar and making their prayers. The three Leapers were kneeling exhausted with their arms out over the goats' backs and their faces buried in the beasts' shaggy fur. The twins could not see so well now because Skinny was standing in front of them with his arms stretched out and trembling towards the altar too. A girl came quietly with a flat basket and sprinkled seeds over the goats and over the altar and over the ground between them; they could see some of the seeds caught in the goats' hair and this made them feel happier because it was what always happened at good sacrifices, the ones at home where father was priest, and the great one that happened the day before they

had started from Athens, to bless them on their voyage. Then the girl cut hair from the foreheads of the goats between their horns, and burnt it on the altar. And then, one after another, from the crowd people began to cry out: 'Herakles!' 'Herakles, do not forget us!' And 'Oh do not forget!' sobbed Skinny from beside them. And Philinna whispered to her brother, very low: 'But he wasn't a giant.' 'He must be in Melos,' Konnos whispered back, 'and he'll help them, he'll help them against us! Oh turn it, Herakles of Athens, turn it against them!' But all these voices that presently joined together during the sacrifice itself to a great rocking shout, must drown his whisper!

The goats were stunned and the Leapers cut their throats, turning their heads to the ground and the Snake in the Stone. Dry wood flared on the altar and the heat beat back against the sweating worshippers and the children up on their ledge. The leaves withered and the shining bryony berries popped and sizzled as the flame came near them. Children came squeezing through the crowd and into the space round the altar to help the Leapers with the skinning; some of them were littler than the twins; they pulled down the flaps of skin and the hot flesh as it was cut away from the bones. From each beast some part was cut away and thrown up and on to the fire so that sparks and burning twigs scattered about the cave and fell on pale faces and open mouths of the singers all round. Then, very quickly, the rest of the goat meat was cut up into small lumps and skewered on to peeled olive sticks and held to the flames to be roasted, while the Leapers crouched

over the stripped carcases of the beasts and their hands dabbled in the hot, clammy guts. The singing died down. A woman in the crowd fainted and was carried out. The twins saw Eripha smiling and standing steadily and praying aloud, but not loud enough for them to hear her. The children who were roasting the meat shifted the spits from hand to hand or shielded their faces from the flames. The Leapers got to their feet with the dripping, stinking armsful of guts, that wreathed their arms and stained and slobbered their chests and bellies. 'He will remember!' they said. 'He is taking the sacrifice!' 'Herakles remembers Melos!' And then they all shouted again, but it was not a very glad shout, not like it had been at that Athenian sacrifice for the colonists: it was bitter and angry and mocking and the Leapers let the foul stuff glide from them to the floor of the cave.

The children with the spits full of meat came in among the crowd and everyone tore off a piece and ate, and the hot juicy lumps in their mouths made them all want to laugh and sing and be happy again and remember the years before. Skinny pulled off pieces from a spit held up to him and shoved two of them at the twins. They shook their heads. 'But you must!' he said, 'You must worship too! Eat, eat!' And he pressed the meat of the sacrifice against their faces and they had to eat because they were afraid of him saying aloud who they were.

He was muttering to himself now, or half to himself and half to them: 'Herakles will help us. He will break the hills and come out. He has remembered us!'

And now half the crowd were going, hurrying away. The twins saw Eripha turn and go quickly. Only some were left standing round the altar and the shield and the mask and the other queer things that belonged to the giant. Among them were the two old witches that the children had seen the first day.

'Come,' said Skinny, and they got up obediently and followed him along the edge of the cave, though their legs and backs were limp with tiredness. Suddenly Konnos caught hold of his sister and whispered: 'I know! I've thought what the smell is! It's the rest of the Melians, the ones who were killed, they're here and they've been worshipping too!' Then both of them looked from side to side of the cave entrance and saw the newer earth rammed and flattened against the rock, and felt under their feet where it had been dug up and then put back, and they ran whimpering out of the unclean place and past the Stone of the Snake and out on to the narrow path again. The moon had set and at first they could not go nearly so fast as they wanted to, but by the time they were at the end of the path and back in the safe woods, dawn was beginning to shift the black out of the sky, and when they got home there was a grey and ambiguous light over the whole world.

It took Nurse all her time to wake the twins three hours later. When they managed to open their eyes and sit up she was quite white and panting. 'What's the matter with you?' she cried. 'Are you poisoned, my duckies? Has that Eripha got at you?' But Philinna said: 'We had bad dreams – hadn't we, Konnylé? And then we couldn't get to sleep again. Don't tell father.

will you, Nurse!' And Nurse muttered: 'So it was him gave you bad dreams, was it, the old goat! If I can catch that girl one day – !' But she went out and left them to dress and feel very hungry for breakfast.

When they came down there was Eripha in the kitchen with her ear-rings and necklace and everything and the usual fidgety grin, half frightened and half cheeky. The children ate their breakfast quickly because they did not want to be in the same room with her. Then Konnos went out to help in the cornfield. There was not much yield because it had been autumn-sown the year before, and, of course, neglected and trampled on in the fighting just when it should have been looked after, but still, what there was left was worth having. He stayed out in the harvest field all day, working properly with sickle and stick, till his back was aching and his head going round. Father praised him but made him stop. And, lying under an olive tree with the sun beginning to slope towards evening and a jug of wine to drink like a grown-up and his own sheaves bound and stacked to look at proudly, there was still a picture of the giants and witches of Melos throbbing through his head.

Philinna stayed close to Nurse and Sostraté all day, trying to forget it too. She paid attention very carefully to everything they said and wove a beautiful piece of cloth, doing the plain part so well that they let her do the border all by herself. But in the heat of the afternoon she went to sleep with her head against the loom post and woke crying because she thought a dead giant was chasing her. Nurse gave her some camomile

tea which was very nasty, and then set her to do cross-stitch trees on the edge of the dress; they were quick and easy and one could think about them all the time because of the different colours.

Sostraté was very restless all day, scurrying to the window and back again, trying on all her dresses and running about the room in her chemise between times, curling her hair in front with a wet finger, though the heat always took it out again an hour later, and tinkling her new ear-rings. At last in the evening when she was over at the window for the fiftieth time she gave a little squeal of excitement. 'Oh look!' she said, and the other two ran up and peered out at each side of her. Father was coming up the valley with two sickles over his shoulder and Konnos was coming with him, very tired and rubbing his eyes, with a very draggled bunch of corn cockles in one hand. But there was a young man in a clean blue and white tunic walking beside father. 'That's him!' said Sostraté, 'oh, I do think he's nice.'

'Well,' said old Nurse, 'it looks to me you're in luck, my dovey, there aren't too many young men to be had these days.'

'But what is he going to do?' said Philinna, quite bewildered, and Sostraté burst into a terrible fit of giggles, first because of the question and next because the young man looked up at the window.

'Ooh, all sorts of things!' she said, and began dancing round the room.

'Silly little goose of a big sister you have!' said Nurse, sitting down and taking Philinna on her knee, 'she's going to be married, of course.'

'Oh,' said Philinna. 'And go away?'

'And have a house of my own, own, own!' sang Sostraté, 'with no Melian girls in it!'

'So you think Eripha's a witch too?' said Philinna solemnly.

The other two both laughed. 'Yes, that's it,' said Sostraté, 'a witch! So you won't have any big sister to bother you after next month, Phil'a!'

But Philinna said nothing and by and by they saw she was crying.

'What's the matter now?' said Sostraté. 'What's to be done with these twins, nurse? If they go on being as good as they've been to-day, they'll burst! Phil'a, you silly baby, why are you crying?'

'I want to go away too!' said Philinna, 'I don't like Melos!'

'But I'm not going away from Melos,' said Sostraté, suddenly quiet again. 'I wish I was. I wish I was going to Athens to see my darling Lysilla!'

'Perhaps we shall some day,' said Philinna, 'perhaps we shan't be able to stay here always. Perhaps the Melians will get strong again and not let us.'

'What has got into your head!' Sostraté said. 'They're all as dead as door nails. But when the Spartans are all dead too perhaps we shall go home!'

'With lovely crowns for Our Lady up on the hill,' said Philinna softly. 'I think we shall go back. But before then there'll be years and years and years! Oh, Sostraté, when shall I be old enough to be married too?'

But Sostraté was not listening to her any longer. She had gone over to the window again; father and the

young man were sitting on the bench outside, drinking and talking, and she wanted to hear every word she could. So did old Nurse. They were both kneeling up against the window-sill, so as to look out without being seen too obviously, and Philinna was left standing in the middle of the room beside the loom. Konnos came in, with the wilted flowers in his hand still. As Philinna took them one or two fell on the floor. And gradually her fingers seemed to get loose and more and more slipped out of the bunch. And they stood there looking into one another's eyes, and each of them was wondering which of the dreadful things the other was thinking about.

PHILISTÉ'S WEAVING SONG

They've sent to the God my luck to find:
Am I to marry the boy I played with?
Oh my cousin, the Fates are blind,
How can they know the clay we're made with?

Under the stars that hang so high
The creaking wheels of the weeks go by.

Ah, in Delphi the days run quick,
Things to do and to see and think of:
Look back to home and Philisté sick
Of time that's a bitter cup to drink of!

But past to-morrow, that nymph so shy,
The creaking wheels of the weeks go by.

I must be weaving my wedding veil,
Weave the sheets I shall lie on after.
May my wishes and prayers avail
Whether I weave for tears or laughter!

And on to the day I shall dance or cry
The creaking wheels of the weeks go by.

THE HIGHBROW

The curtains blew about just a little; one of the roses in the bowl suddenly let fall all its petals, which danced across the room like tiny birds. Timanthes, the owner of the roses, was middle-aged and fat, and loved them; in winter, even, he had his cushions stuffed with rose-leaves, though they did no more than remind him, quite faintly, of what his garden would be like by May. He was a prosperous shipowner of Gela, with three sons and a pretty but obedient daughter, and in fact everything that anyone could want. The Gods had been kind.

Another and another of the roses came to pieces, till there were pink and red petals shed untidily over the whole room. He called for a slave to clear them up: of course it was Xenaides that came – it always was. Probably because he didn't spend all his master's time playing dice and chattering to the maids like those other young rascals. But it made Timanthes uncomfortable, the way he crushed those poor rose-leaves up in his hands. Yes, very. 'Is there anything else I can do, sir?'

'No, nothing – except –'

'Yes?'

'Except – God's Belly, can't you stop looking so Athenian?' The man put his hand nervously up to his

face: 'I can't help it. And – and – "Shut is my City's gate, All men are equal and nothing, when the Gods hate." ' Timanthes brought his fist down with a thump on the couch: 'Name of the Dog, there you go again! Can't you ever get done with your dirty poets? There, get away, get away, I've no fault to find with your work!' Oof. He blew his cheeks out: Xenaides was gone away. But he hated losing his temper, it upset his digestion, and since that man had been in the house he had lost it several times, he was getting – yes, distinctly – thinner.

The roses blew about again: oh, let them, let them! To-morrow he'd have jasmin – or lilies – or something that stayed still anyhow! His eldest son, Euphron, came in: 'What's the matter, father? Someone been worrying you?'

Timanthes looked up, prepared to be annoyed over anything: 'Your beard,' he said. 'Disgusting! Grow it or don't grow it, but at least don't come into my room looking like a hedgehog!'

Euphron gave a comfortable laugh: 'My nice new Gylippos fringe! Really, father, you must try and remember the fashions!'

'Oh, you've been insufferable since you came back from Syracuse, you and your Spartan ways!' But all the same Timanthes began to laugh himself: 'Tell me, hedgehog, why didn't you learn how to deal with Athenians?'

Euphron frowned: 'Is that Xenaides again? You'd much better leave him to me, father. I'll take the conceit out of him.'

'But it's not that: he's quite respectful, you know.

I've nothing to punish him for – I mean, just the way he talks, I should be ashamed to do anything for just that. But there, that's it, he does make me ashamed, somehow. I don't like it, hedgehog.'

'Nonsense, father; you're too good-natured, that's all. The man thinks he can do anything, stalks about the house as if he owned it! I tell you what it is, we've got to knock some of these fancy ideas out of his head: Athens!' – he spat on the floor – 'ought to be in the quarries still – that taught them!'

Timanthes shook his head. 'It's all very well your talking, but you've hardly even seen the man; you go gadding about so these days. But I wish I'd never bought him. Anyway it mayn't be for long, because he's written to Athens: and if his people do buy him back, it won't do for him to go saying the bad time he had here. No, we must just let him alone.'

'Well, you may be right. But – if you do catch him out, send for me.'

They began talking about other things: weather and prices and the wine market at Carthage. In the meantime Xenaides, going out between the myrtle-tubs in the court of the house, had met the boy Delphion, Timanthes' youngest son, who caught him by the arm. 'Finished with father? Then come on!'

'Where?'

'To the beach. Our side's one man short – you must play.'

'What's the game, Delphion?'

'Oh, you know, prisoners' base. It's a Doric game Xenaides, all the fashion now!'

Xenaides, however, didn't laugh; not that he took things very seriously as a rule, but still after Syracuse, Dorians weren't a laughing matter. The boy perhaps saw, and hurried him down, talking hard, on to the beach where they did most of their playing. For want of an island they had their game on a little spit of rock and sand that ran out into the sea; it was nothing like so serious or violent as the Spartan game, but still the prisoners on each side were apt to get a few mouthfuls of salt water.

The rest were all Delphion's age or thereabouts, none quite full-grown; they threw their bright-coloured tunics down on the sand and shouted at one another, bare-headed in the sun. Xenaides was much older than any of them; he waited under the shadow of the rocks, looking out to sea, till they were ready. Delphion would have been more sensible to take one of his father's house-boys to play, but, for the moment, he was far more interested in Xenaides, and no wonder: an Athenian, captain of cavalry, a man who'd read everything that was worth reading, seen half the world, fought in the greatest war there'd ever been, and besides – Delphion being a boy of quick sensibilities – had been in the quarries, had the horse-head burnt on him. Well, wasn't that all rather fascinating when one belonged to a little dead-and-alive state like Gela? – not that father didn't think it the finest place in the world, and of course if you looked at it one way it was. He shouted to Xenaides to come over and join the south side.

Their feet flickered on the hard sand, running and dodging and catching one another. At first Xenaides

had kept rather out of it, but by and by the spirit of the game got into him and he played well and happily. Ordinarily, he would have been much more than a match for any of them, but these last months, starved and sick in the quarries, had been too bad for six weeks' good food and quarters in Timanthes' house to put right. After a little he was caught. By the rules of the game a prisoner could try and escape until he had actually been forced over to the base. Delphion had hold of him – they had changed sides at the counting-out – and suddenly saw the lines of his face change, felt the sharp heave of the muscles under his hand, and shouted for the others to help. Two of them ran up, and the small waves twinkled round their feet as they tried to haul him back to the base. But for Xenaides the game had all gone black in a moment, his mind had darted back in panic to that last time: so had he felt hands on him, so water underfoot, ah, the blood in that little stream! – he must get away, quick, anyhow: he got one hand clear, blindly feeling for a sword, then struck hard with clenched fists at a head: hands loosened, he was away. Thirty feet off, he remembered again that it was a game and turned, and saw the others holding up Delphion, whose head swayed, white, dripping blood. He came back at once.

The sting of the salt water brought Delphion to himself again; he looked round dizzily, both hands at his forehead, wondering who had spoilt the game for him. He saw it was Xenaides, and tried to laugh though it jarred his head horribly: then almost at once felt a blur over everything and dropped again. The game

stopped. Two of the others carried their friend home, glaring at Xenaides, who followed them anxiously, watching every movement by the boy. Delphion's sister ran out and screamed, till every woman about the place was on the spot, with her own special remedy for the young master; he tried to brush them away, feebly, but they carried him off to their own quarters, and left the Athenian waiting – till Timanthes was told.

He was always afraid of doing something stupid now, of not remembering; when anyone said anything that made him angry, he would feel his head and hands grow hot, and his tongue was loosened as though he were drunk, and then something he didn't choose would happen. He had always been like that a little, but at home in the old days it was only funny, and he could control it; but now the strength of his will was gone, and when he felt it coming there was no stopping it. He prayed he might stay himself, and said over, under his breath, a chorus that he knew of old had power like gentle hands on him, the Chorus of the Argive Women to Elektra. But perhaps he would never see the plays again.

Elektra, going to death, with both hands already
On the black lintel of the door to the house of sin,
Turn your eyes to us once, princess, oh sister unwedded,
Ere that door, opening silently, swallow you and your purpose in:
The thing that was in your mind and now at the last you have said it.

Listen to us, us women, who know what thing is weakness
How the strong seem like Gods, hard to hurt, hard even to touch,
When no one answers, no help comes, for any thought or seeking,
When the spirit is nearly broken and pain comes overmuch:
Yet if that were the only end we would not stay to speak you.

For the strong are not Gods: neither with sore word nor sword smiting
Can they bruise the guarded heart of the smallest, the most oppressed.
Ah, do not fear for the still flame you have lighted:
This from your fast shut mind nor man nor woman may wrest,
Elektra, going to death, to the steel-bright halls of the mighty.

He was back in the room with the roses, trying to think if there was anything it was any use saying to Timanthes; but nobody would understand why he had hurt Delphion; he hardly knew himself. He was glad the boy was not very bad; it was no use saying that either. Timanthes came in, purple with anger; he had been working himself up. The Athenian knelt quickly and stayed quite still, wanting not to hear, trying to let it all rush over him and away. Suddenly Timanthes hit him, which was more funny than painful: a rose petal

came running along just under his nose, round and round on its edge. Timanthes, relieved at having done something violent, was beginning to calm down, and Xenaides began to listen, thinking now was the moment if he was to make any excuses, thankful to be still so level-minded. He lifted his head a little and Timanthes broke out again: what a vile accent the man had, to be sure! He was still alive and sane after Syracuse: a beating more or less from this shopkeeper wouldn't hurt him.

Yes, Timanthes was distinctly less angry than he had been. 'Now, have you got anything to say for yourself?' He was a just man at bottom, the shopkeeper. Xenaides began: 'Sir, I'm more sorry than I can say. But it's the sort of game –'

All at once Euphron was there; he was wearing armour, reminding one again of the old time. 'My turn, father,' he said. His voice had just caught a little of the Spartan harshness, enough to shiver at. 'So you think you're still at Athens? Oh, quite the young aristocrat!' he began, horridly quiet. 'But it's a pity you've not learnt there's been a little change in the last year.' Xenaides shivered; the words in his mouth wouldn't come. He looked down again – let this pass over too. But it would not pass over, he had to listen, and as he listened he began to feel very sick. He knew he could not stand pain so well now, and this – this would take all his standing. He squeezed his hands against his face, kneeling and shaking, and looked once at his master. But Timanthes was leaning back, blowing and puffing, his eyes on the ceiling, out of reach. Now,

thought Xenaides, now I know what it is to be a slave, and then: this will be worse than the quarries because I shall be alone. Straining, he called his reason to help him: 'My letter,' he said, 'my letter home! They'll send money – I – you –' But how could he – how could he go on with Euphron looking like that? – like all the faces that had mocked them over the edge of the quarries, out of their asphodel fields, that could not be appealed to, though you tried at first for days; but not later. He went where he was taken, stumbling. It was not till he was tied up that Euphron spoke again: 'Athens,' he said meditatively, sucking his lip and running his hand along the edge of a whip lash.

Xenaides shut his eyes tight; for one moment Athens was there for him too, light, light, happy, and full of laughter, full of friends, incredibly far and long ago, and tiny and dear – before the fleet sailed for Syracuse. Then the mirror broke, Athens fell away, he was no more a citizen of that city, but a slave, being hurt, being shamed, gasping, crying with pain. He knew, somehow, that he could have borne it if only – if only – they gave him time to think, catch at himself between times – or a year ago – but not now.

Delphion stayed in bed for three days, with the best surgeon in Gela seeing to him, and all the women of the house cooking for him, bringing him flowers, scent, kisses, till he suddenly felt sick of it all – and got up. 'Where's Xenaides?' he had asked, and was told the man was being punished. He frowned, and answered his father crossly, but he knew that, however little he wanted it, discipline was necessary in a big house like

theirs – the biggest house in Gela! The next time he asked, still no Xenaides. Delphion went for his brother then: 'You are a beast, Euphron!' he said. 'Why do you chain him? Why do you make him work at the mill? Why can't I have him out?'

Said Euphron: 'That's what happens to people who hurt you,' and kissed him.

Delphion rubbed off the kiss and stamped: 'Let him out! I wasn't hurt. Father, make Euphron let him out!'

Timanthes fidgeted; he hated thinking of anything unpleasant; since the first day he had, for that reason, not thought of his slave – or tried not to; unless the roses reminded him. Not indoors – he had pinks now – but out of doors, strewing their petals on the garden paths. He answered the boy soothingly: 'It won't do the man any harm, my Delphion, just till your brother thinks there's no more mischief in him.'

'But he's not that sort!' said Delphion. 'You know, father! It would do for any nigger, any barbarian; but Xenaides – he's not a common slave!'

'Yes, he is,' said Euphron suddenly, unexpectedly fierce out of that spiky beard of his, 'and he'll know it now! And so will you when you see him. And listen to this, Delphion; do you know what would have happened if Athens had got her way? She'd have grabbed us all, gobbled us up, the whole of Sicily, to dangle after her and do what she told us, and lick her boots! And there'd have been plenty of young sparks like your Xenaides stalking about, frizzed and scented, giving us orders and doing whatever they chose with us! You wouldn't have liked that, Delphion.'

'Yes, but –'

'Yes, but that's what it would have been, and that's what I'm taking out of Xenaides. And that's what the quarries were for, by God! – and that's why I like the Spartans,' he ended savagely, so that the room seemed to shake, and the other two had nothing to say for a moment.

Delphion, who was still a little weak, began to cry, and Timanthes was most uncomfortable; he admired his eldest son for being so fierce, such a man, and yet – apart from this one thing – Xenaides had always been a good servant, quick and clever and quiet, and the punishment would leave him crippled – well, not in body, but in his face, all sullen and horrible to live with, wouldn't it be? 'I think all the same,' said he, 'you might let him off any longer at the mill.'

Just then a slave came in with a thick, sealed letter that a ship's officer had just brought. Euphron handed it to his father with a sudden, unpleasant laugh; it was for the Athenian. 'We must have him up now,' said Timanthes, with some satisfaction, and gave the slave his orders. 'See that the man's washed and – and fed,' he added low, with a glance at Delphion. The slave hurried off, leaving his three masters looking at one another, Timanthes with pursed lips weighing the letter in his hand, and the boy looking triumphantly at his brother. Euphron seemed not to notice, to be absorbed in something: some thought, some hate.

By and by, Xenaides was brought in. Delphion jumped at him, but his brother caught him and pushed him back, then held out the letter to Xenaides, who

hesitated, then snatched it like a starving dog, his hands shaking at the seal. The boy could see how his face was sunken, his eyes bloodshot, the brand-mark of Syracuse standing out in white and shrivelled skin, and a sort of blurred, bent look all about him; and two nails on his right hand blackened and split. It was as if Delphion had seen a slave for the first time: there, but for the grace of God. . . . The Athenian spoke to Timanthes: 'Your price is still the same, sir?' Euphron started saying something, but checked himself, and 'Certainly, certainly,' fussed Timanthes, picking at the arm of his chair. Xenaides looked round for the little balance, found it, and weighed out the gold; the others looked on. He put the pile of coins down beside his master: 'Now – is that all? Am I free?'

'We must make it legal, before a magistrate,' said Timanthes, 'but to-morrow, to-morrow will do.'

'To-day,' said Euphron harshly, 'and out of the house he goes!'

'It's not your house!' said Delphion. 'Oh, Xenaides, I'm sorry –' But the Athenian was not looking at him – he went on to Timanthes: 'But you count me free from this moment?'

'Yes,' said Timanthes, 'oh yes.'

Xenaides took a deep breath and pulled himself together, jerkily, till he stood upright, light on his feet again. Then he stepped forward and hit Euphron in the face with his open hand, not very hard, but with a sting. Timanthes gasped and sank a little into his chair. Delphion twisted his hands together with a cry of excitement. But Euphron went quite white, caught

Xenaides round the shoulder with his left arm and stabbed him twice – three times – into his side, so that the Athenian fell, slid from him with a queer, long, outward sigh, and died in his own blood.

Euphron leant against the table, heavily. 'So much for Athens,' he said, but his voice shook. 'We must get this – cleared up. Well, nobody need know about the letter. Father, you can see to that.' But for a little while neither of the others could speak.

WISE DIOTIMA

(Poem for M.)

So I said: 'What is love, Diotima?' And she answered me:
'I will show you images, Sokrates, for the truth is hidden.
Love is a caged bird, but you shall set him free,
He shall be guest at your feast where only the Good are bidden,
He shall build you a nest against chaos in a lovely and growing tree.'

Then I said: 'How shall I know him? For many things are Good.'
So she: 'You will live more finely, with thought stronger and keener,
And all your senses shall brighten like sunshine through a wood;
When love is there your eyes and mind will be cleaner,
Clearness shall fill your heart as you gaze at the place where he stood.'

And I: 'Is Love kind, Diotima? And is your talk true?'
But she looked at me softly: 'His kindness is overflowing;

Love takes the pain from loneliness, maybe from death
too,
But you cannot argue this, Sokrates, with all your aye-
ing and noing,
And as for the truth – that lies between me and you –'

THE CHOSEN-BY-LOT

All this happened two years ago. I wish I knew what was going to happen to any of us now.

Aristokles had written a play. It was called Minos, or the Chosen-by-Lot, because the chorus were, almost of course, the tribute boys and maidens from Athens. I still think it was a good play, but not a great play as he thought it then: as, in fact, most of us did. A great deal of it was the dialogue between old Minos, sitting secure on his great gold throne outside his great gold palace with his head sunk down on his shoulders – for Aristokles had made us see, and meant to make his actors see, just what his picture was – and young Theseus with his sharp face and thin flickering tunic. That Theseus was Aristokles himself of course; it seems bound to be so with a first play, unless, perhaps – but it seems almost unimaginable – a man could somehow combine that terrific inward flame, which Aristokles alone of us had, enough to take him through all the preparations and lassitude, all the struggles and despairs of bringing a thing to its conclusion, with the outward view which would show him the whole world and himself no more than his just part of it. At least, that is what one is bound to think after listening to so much talk about it; I never know if I can quite see it

myself. But how was Aristokles to get that, young and untouched as he was then?

So Theseus attacked tyranny, not violently, with a screaming torrent of words and Gods' names, and hot well-worn phrases like a demagogue, but finely, like the aristocrat he was, weaving the ideas into an intricate and delicate mesh of poetry, so that no beauty of land or sea or air came amiss in his mouth. It was Theseus very proud, in a way, of all his world-embracing mind – full of theories worked out and quick perceptions, but very modest in so far as he could regard from the outside this tangle of interactions that was himself, not daring yet to hope, at least never to put into words, his own future rule over Athens. And you saw Minos gradually turn from contempt to anger and then to some sort of half religious acceptance of all this as possible, at any rate for some city. But the chorus pointed it all by their crying back to Athens, first the lost, lovely Athens of their despair, and then, at the end, as Theseus stood in the centre with the dripping sword in his right hand and the cloak over his face, waiting for the Minotaur's death to be turned into some new strength and achievement, an Athens of their hope, radiant and coloured with their life and happiness. Never a real Athens. But the real Athens was the one thing none of us ever saw; we were too young. It is very hard to be a citizen of a real city and also of the same city in your dream. Sokrates has been that, though.

We were all terribly excited about the play; we had seen it coming hard and solid in his mind out of the

first vagueness and tag-ends of verse and trying-on of new word-forms like a fresh way of pinning one's cloak, that started it. We had heard him talk about it till it was as real to us as it was to him – so I suppose we never saw it clearly and dispassionately from the outside. But obviously he was the only one of us whose writing was worth while. We felt it represented us all. Each of us had come to intellectual birth and life in this atmosphere thick and smelling with ideas of government. We had seen some of them tried and fail. Eratosthenes is my mother's brother and at first he had me persuaded that the rule of the Thirty was the wisest and best in the world as it is, that democracy inevitably goes wrong and must be succeeded and purified by oligarchy. But after I had seen it happening that theory had to go and a new one come in its place! And now I don't think I can judge. After all, I have never counted as one of the leaders of this generation. I am older; I fought in the war. When I was only just grown-up I saw people I knew being drowned at Arginusæ and I couldn't help them. Aristokles never saw anything like that. The siege was different; after the first day it didn't hit one suddenly. Things on the whole happened slowly, and slowly one gets right from them. But I had got one hurt and one hate into my mind during the war, hate of our enemies: not Lysander alone, but the whole of Sparta. And afterwards, I couldn't just shake myself and think that King Pausanias, at least, had been amazingly fair in his dealings with us, and that one could begin to regard some of the Spartans as friends, and change one's hate over to

the people who were hurting Athens from the inside. Aristokles could do that; he was virgin minded; he had not had his life and love and hate tumbled about as I had; he could start fresh on hope for a new Athens because when he grew up things were at their blackest, and had to grow better afterwards. He couldn't really remember the time before.

It was this fresh-mindedness that one loved. It left him free to see things clear: clearer than they ever are in fact. But someone must have that vision. And it gave him the odd sort of strength to tighten and tense his standards of taste till the most tiny and fantastic differences became worth while. Perhaps most of us care too little for the ultimate delicacies of living and observing, but he cared too much. I have known very few artists, but I suspect this must be what is wrong with them all, what makes any dealings with them so uncomfortable: this too great tension. But for the moment at least, Aristokles had life and vigour enough to carry it through and sweep us off our feet and persuade us that he was right. He did seem to us definitely inspired, and if part of it must be all this worrying over fine points either of political theory or, say one of his pet metres, and then, when the difficulty was over, shouting half over Athens that it was a marvellous new discovery, well: we put up with it for the sake of his untouched life and power of plunging head-on into any problem, and because we felt that he, and he alone, could speak for us.

As for me, I attached myself so firmly to him and his friends all the more because I am so much older and

more worn and tired; I felt they were more likely to have the truth than I was. Truth is such a very bright thing. I couldn't always go as far as they did, and I couldn't always be with them; they found me just depressing sometimes, and when they did I felt them feeling it, and merely grew worse. But over this play of his I let myself go and thought that here at last was the voice of our generation beginning to speak in a beautiful pattern.

We didn't know how it would be received. It was plainly an aristocratic play; it might, we thought, smell rather of all those uncles and grandfathers and cousins of ours, who hadn't, after all, been tanners or lyre-makers or sausage-sellers! The sentiment was democratic enough, but somehow it wasn't the same democracy as Thrasybulos and his very respectable friends, and we were afraid that something more like that would be needed for the Dionysia. We were all prepared to comfort Aristokles if it was refused by telling him how much too fine for the judges it was.

Of course it was his first play, and there were sure to be two or three at least of the well-known writers producing something. We'd heard rumours of Chairemon's 'Perseus in Libya' where half the chorus masks were to be black with gilt eyes, and Iophon's 'Solon' which, of course, was the one that finally did get the First Prize, a very good play of its kind, not too hard to understand, with verses in it that anyone could take home and say over to his daughters! You couldn't lift little bits like that out of the 'Chosen-by-Lot.' But at any rate our play got as far as being accepted and we

rushed off with the news to Aristokles, who was sitting at home with his head in his hands groaning out how bad it was and how he knew they'd refuse it at once and be perfectly right!

He gave a party for us all. He got most delightfully excited about it and everything, and recited great bits of his own choruses standing on the table stamping and flinging his arms out. We were all a little mad about him and it that night. Even I managed to have quite a whole mind and belief, and thought that this was the beginning of a new age of poetry.

He had been rushing about the city all the morning, ordering food and flowers – twice too much of everything, but that was hardly his fault, we were most of us too pleased to eat – and asking anybody he knew by sight even. There was Iophon himself, very nice to us all and encouraging Aristokles to go forward with poetry; the difference of age between them was just enough for Aristokles to be able to look up to Iophon as a master and take his praise with delight, and yet think all the time how much better a poet he himself was! And there was old Aristophanes, who was usually very kind too; but that night he was tired and hadn't wanted to come, only Aristokles had half dragged him along; he was grumpy and very sleepy and wouldn't sing. There was Phædo and his brother, and everyone one wanted to see. And there was Sokrates the stonemason whom I hardly knew then, except as one of Aristokles' odd friends. Also I knew he had done two things: most of the Thirty had been pupils or friends of his, and although one could not hold him directly

responsible for their opinions or actions, yet it made us suspicious of him. But at the same time we were impatient and disappointed with Thrasybulos and his present government; Sokrates seemed to voice our criticism better than we could ourselves. I had not made up my mind which way to regard him. Besides this, I knew he used to ask people all sorts of curious questions, but he had never questioned me. I'm not very good at anything and I doubt if he ever chose to talk to just dull tangled people. Besides I thought it was stupid. But Aristokles was very different. One didn't wonder about anyone wanting to question him, or get into the depths of that mind of his, shining and tranquil or dark and violent according to his mood of the day, but always his own.

Phædo and I were next one another and had a great argument about poetry; I can't talk about poetry except when Aristokles is near; in some way he stops me feeling I'm making a fool of myself. I do ordinarily, and now I don't remember a thing about the argument, only that we both quoted Aristokles' poems to prove our points, and then it struck us suddenly how ridiculous that was, and we began laughing, and couldn't stop laughing on and off till all of a sudden we found it was morning, so I suppose we must have been half asleep in the middle of it. It was very pleasant anyhow. But I did not see who Aristokles had been talking to; I mean, later on, when he'd settled down a little and could talk rationally; and in the early morning he was not there. But seven or eight of us had arranged to go back the next afternoon and make copies of the play

for the actors, so I slept till about noon and had a bath and then walked over to his house.

We all sat down with our pens sharpened and our rolls out in front of us with the Title beautifully written at the top and patterns round it – I'd got my little sister to do it for me – and the names of the characters. He was to stand in the middle and read it aloud to us; we were going to take turns to tell him to read it slower! But he didn't come and he didn't come, and we wondered if he'd suddenly turned shy: for sometimes when everything was going best, for no reason at all he'd do that. Yet we couldn't think why just now, when we were all such close friends. And then he did come and he hadn't got the manuscript in his hands as we'd all pictured him; he was looking down, and then he looked at all of us, and he seemed to be trying to speak but couldn't. And Phædo said, 'What is it?' And he said 'I've burnt it,' and Phædo jumped up and said 'You fool, you haven't!' And we all jumped up and Aristokles went in front of us to the next room. And there was a little brazier full of charcoal that had mostly gone out, because he had done it an hour or two ago, but in a few places it was still glowing; he had shoved his play into the mouth of it and held it there with a stick, because there was the grey, quivering burnt roll still keeping its shape except where the loose end had crumpled and crumbled, and the hole the stick had made right through the middle of it.

Aristokles didn't look at it once, but the rest of us did, crowding round on tiptoes. And suddenly Phædo said, 'I can read it still!'

So one could in a few places because the words stood out lightly as they do on burnt paper. It wouldn't have been any good because no one could have touched it without its falling to pieces, but Aristokles jumped in among us and beat it to pieces with his hands and said: 'It's finished! It's finished! I forbid you to speak of it again!' And he ran out of the room like a child.

The only one of us who dared follow him was Phædo, and after a minute or two he came back and said: 'Sokrates made him do it! Sokrates! They began to talk last night and they went on all this morning, and Sokrates asked him if it was worth while and he couldn't find any reasons and he is never going to write poetry again!' And Phædo sat down on the floor beside the brazier and began to cry.

But the rest of us weren't going to accept the thing like that. We said it came of being too excited the evening before and perhaps not sleeping, and poets were like that, all up and down like jumping fish, and Sokrates was an old fool who thought himself clever, but now he'd done it once too often and what were we going to do about it? There wasn't another copy of the play, but Aristokles must have notes somewhere if only we could get at them in time. And each of us tried to remember what he could of the play to write down at once. But almost at the very beginning we got held up. The play started with a long and very beautiful speech by Athene, the Stranger-in-Crete he called her, very elaborate and intricate and full of the ideas in little that were to come out through the whole scene of Theseus' argument with Minos. When she was

gone the chorus of boys and maidens in their dark tunics came on, one by one, joining in the chorus that was at first a whisper and then a cry, in a curiously simple metre, but delicate enough if one had its fine points told over to one by Aristokles, as all of us had! –

'Athens, my darling,
You dimmed to a shadow
As we at the starboard
Knelt gazing how sadly.'
'And on the waves rockt us
From chill crests to southern,'
'They passed us on, mocking
The hand of a mother.'
'And death, as you dimmed, was
The port that grew clearer';
The harsh sea birds skimmed us
And screamed at us nearing.'
'The darkness will find me,
In cold arms enfold me:
Yet warm in my mind you
Lie lovely and golden!'

And so on, till Theseus comes in and there is a little light. The choruses were easy enough, but none of us could quite remember Athene's speech, nor more than the first few lines when Theseus was speaking alone and the chorus waiting. We began to write down our versions, trying to remember the exact words and phrases. Only Phædo said: 'It's no use. He won't have it back.'

But while I was trying to remember I was getting

angrier and angrier with Sokrates, not, I think so much that he had destroyed the play, but that he had put a touch on that clear mind, perhaps cracked the silver mirror of joy and life and eagerness that all the things that had happened yet to Athens and to him, all his angers and hates and violent thought, could do more than momentarily cloud. Perhaps I was wrong. I am still not far enough away to tell, but it seemed to me that this clearness was what I clung to, and the only thing that made me hope in the muddled, unkind world, and I feared and hated Sokrates because it looked as if he had the power to take it from me. At last I said: 'Who is going to Sokrates?'

Phædo looked up and said: 'That's no use either. He won't undo it.'

I said, 'He has done something hateful. We can't leave it.'

But Phædo said, 'Aristokles thinks one word from him better than all the years of talk he's had from us. But the worst of it is that very likely he is right.'

He began to think, sitting quiet and scratching long lines on his clean roll. But most of the rest agreed with me. We were partly angry, and a great deal, I think, jealous.

Finally, I was the one to go. The others were afraid, and I don't wonder now; but I was too furious to be afraid then, and anyhow I knew almost nothing about Sokrates or the power he might get over one's thoughts. But, for Aristokles, I would have gone if he had been a God. I walked straight out of the house and down to the Agora; he was likely to be there, I knew, on that

endless business of looking for something in people's souls that never seemed to be there. But nobody had seen him. Someone said he was down at Piræus, at Pasion's, and I thought if only he'd keep to these foreigners and let us Athenians alone! So I rode down to Piræus as hard as I could; it was a windy day and a great deal of dust was blowing up towards me, so that my little mare and I were grey and gritty with it. There was nothing I wanted so much as a bath. Then the banker wasn't even at home and his fool of a clerk was frightened of me. It was getting latish by the time I got back, and most reasonable people were strolling about in the cool before sunset and beginning to think of supper. But I could only think of my friend who had been hurt. This time I went to Sokrates' house, rather a grubby little house in the stone-masons' quarter with a lop-sided vine growing up it and a good many bunches of grapes just formed and very bright green. The house itself was painted pink and I had to wait a minute or two after knocking. One of his children opened, a nice, dirty, snub-nosed little boy, and asked if I wanted his father. I said yes. So he took me through to the yard where the rough blocks stood against the walls and Sokrates was chipping along a marked line on the square block in the middle. I thought it was just like him to be working when everyone else had stopped, and I smelt onions which must have been his supper getting ready. He had his back to me; he held the chisel at a steady slant with one hand, moving it along the line, and tapped the mallet against it with the other.

I don't remember many things clearly and there are very few things that I want to remember at all, but I do remember everything about the ten minutes after this. The little boy looked round at me; I think he thought I was going to give his father an order for some bits of carving. But I jumped past him into the yard and said: 'Sokrates!'

He turned round. He was wearing an old workman's tunic that left one shoulder bare and half his hairy chest. He pointed to another, lower stone, and said: 'Do sit down.'

But I said: 'I've come about the play!' I'd meant to say all sorts of other things at once to show him how I hated him. But one never does.

And he said: 'About Plato?' He always called people by their nicknames, and gave them himself too; I think it was he who gave Aristokles his funny name Plato, just because he was so broad across the forehead. It was one of the silly, rather nice things about Sokrates that made him as difficult to hate as a child. So now: 'About Plato?'

And I nodded, because of course that was what I did mean, not really the play. I said: 'He has burnt it! It's your fault.'

But he said: Are you sure it's my fault? Plato burnt the play himself.'

'Because you told him it was no good! What right have you to say that to a poet, stone-chipper?'

'But I didn't tell him it was no good,' said Sokrates, 'I only asked him to consider it. Did you think it was a good play, Derkylos?'

I said, 'Yes!' And again I was going to say a lot more, only I stopped.

'Tell me,' said Sokrates, 'for I don't know myself, and you seem to, what is a good play?'

But I saw what snares he was laying for me, and though in one way I wanted to answer him, badly as I knew I should, because, after all, I am not a poet, yet that wasn't really the point; I wanted to get back to my friend who had beaten the ashes of the work he had loved to dust under my eyes. So I said: 'What did *he* say to that?'

And Sokrates said: 'He didn't know either.' Now at first I thought he was just glad, as a Faun among men might be glad, to have found still another foolish soul. But then I looked at his face and his very kind, sad eyes, and it seemed to me that he was an old man and that truly he wanted wisdom from people and still hoped to find it somewhere. And I knew that instead of getting wisdom from them he got love or hate; and if there was anyhow any passing on of this wisdom it was he who gave it. And I knew why his mouth was gentle and his eyes sad. But I did not think of it all together like that at once; I only stopped being angry with him. I said: 'I'm not a poet and he is; but isn't it hard to say what is happening when one is inspired, filled with a God? For I am sure he has been. Now you have taken that away!'

But Sokrates said: 'No man has power over a God,' and first he frowned and then his eyes cleared and he said, 'When you speak of God, do you know what you mean, Derkylos? I think you mean, and Plato meant

when he said the same thing to me, another very strong power, who is not any God I acknowledge. I think this God of yours is also named Ignorance. For when Plato was full of it he was a little mad. But should not a poet know what he is doing just as much as a stone-cutter does? If the thing he makes is good, his soul should be sure and rational and clear and happy, as it is when it has knowledge of any other good.'

I said: 'His soul was like that when he finished the play, Sokrates.'

And Sokrates said: 'Then why, why did it fly apart in confusion and doubt when I touched it? Madness and ignorance must have been underneath it. I only asked him such a few questions, Derkylos. I only asked him the things I wanted to know so much that I had to ask.'

I said: 'He will never be the same again, never really happy and looking straight forward, never after this! Why did you have to touch him, Sokrates?'

So Sokrates wiped his chisel on the edge of his tunic and laid it and the mallet on the top of the block and came and sat beside me. He said: 'You are sad for your friend, Derkylos, because you do not truly wish for his good, only for your own satisfaction in him. But I have put desire into him that was not there before, because he was easily happy; with a new idea of government, or a new way of writing a chorus, or some facile and accidental beauty he had found in words which are, in themselves, wingless things, lame guides from one man's mind to another's. But now he has this desire, and he will never be satisfied with anything that is in

his power or any man's power to do. For a little time, the time of striving and making, he will be satisfied, but then he will see how far the thing falls short of his wish, and he will have to start again. And the desire will never leave him quiet, to be content and, in the mere being, to cease from action and thought and life, and turn to an image as most men turn sooner or later. But he will have a new God in him now who will lead him not blindly and confusedly into a maze of words, but with knowledge, and towards no dull and attainable goal. So do not be sad any longer, Derkylos, because Plato's soul will be no more calm and ignorant; but do yourself take up desire and trouble. And I will not say to you: take happiness with it. Because you are a grown man and brave, and happiness will seem to you a mean thing. But I will say: take desire for knowledge, and life will not let you go by.'

And I remember these things that Sokrates said to me, and how I became giddy with that desire for knowledge and more life that he could put into people. And I remember I went out of his house again with my heart beating as though I were in love; and the dusty, narrow street of the stone-masons was full of terrific questions and importances; and between there and my own house there was no single thing I saw but was bursting and flaring with its content of thoughts and ideas.

But I cannot hold a God in my soul. The desire faded out, however much I grasped at it and tried to remember not only how it made me think and act, but what in its essence it was. When I see Sokrates he can,

if he chooses, give it me again, but I cannot keep it. I am not like Aristokles and Phædo; they can keep it and let it work in them like rooting grain: at least Aristokles can. And perhaps if Sokrates had not laid hands on that untouched soul of his, someone or something else must soon have come; the thing could not have lasted for ever. Whatever had happened to him, he would be grown-up now, as he is.

Sokrates is in prison. Nobody really wanted him to die. The accusers only asked for death so that he might offer to go away from Athens or keep quiet himself. They were trying to do their best by Athens, the Athens that is, not the Athens that Theseus-Aristokles hoped for and wrote about; and they wanted to be let alone, to be allowed to be satisfied and grow, as he said, like images, and not be criticized and questioned and jabbed into life again. And I understand that, because they were trying very hard to govern well and forget old hates; they were nearly doing it, but that was not enough for Sokrates. But they did not want to kill him. Only he would not help himself; he would not be serious with them and treat them as grown-up, as he treats Aristokles now, or anyone who has this desire of his. Not that I have it. But we had made a splendid plan for him to escape; we were going to smuggle him out of prison and over the frontier to Thebes where we have friends; I was going to lend them my horses. We knew they would not guard the prison too well. But Sokrates will not escape. He wants to keep the laws of whatever Athens it is, his, or Aristokles', or the worthless Athens it seems sometimes to be.

Aristokles will keep his desire, but I will lose mine because I have always been stupid and had an ugly, confused mind, and Sokrates will not be there to help me. I do not know what Aristokles will do or whether he will stay here afterwards. I expect I shall stay here and grow stupider until I am quite old. Very soon the Sacred Ship will have come back and the time it gave us will be over. And I wonder if Sokrates will get the wisdom he wants.

PROFESSOR WHITEHEAD AND THE POETS

There are eternal colours that haunt all Aprils
Back through a million years darting, escaping,
On beyond thought, brightly, palely, reaching.
Oh how all summer one longs for green of beech leaves
Unfolding, brilliant, at bare edges of copses!
The great beeches endure, while men change and die, and crops are
Changing too in the fields; but at last time touches
The greatest beech: crashes in a gale. But man, clutching
Consciously at eternity, sees again the young green, the colour
He can be certain of, come back, bring his strained hopes sweet lulling
In knowledge that this must be true in all remotest spring-times.

But the whin, and the thousand primroses, and the violet clinging
To the budding bank, and the young hyacinths, the round-twigged hedges,
And the daisy fields, the wild orchises, cowslips, kingcups edging

The shooting rush marsh, all these are urgent with change:
The unkeepable April, the violence of life ranging
From shape to shape: no other Springs will have them
Ever the same.
But the Whole will be there to ravish
Unborn lovers, walking those lanes. The pale greens and the yellows,
The ash blue and the sky blue and the soft light indwelling,
And the gayness, the sureness of the colours! These, these are the spirits
More than enduring: eternal: yet not One: for the mirror
Of our earth time reflects them, the precious, but seldom and thinly,
Cut off wholly by long days of summer and winter;
Yet returning, each April as the heart's beat returns.
And so continue
The April colours. So in Spring the poets always are saddened
By the passing of the primroses. But the philosopher gladly
Looks at eternity.

WHO WILL YOU HAVE FOR NUTS IN MAY?'

THAT morning Pheidon got up early and into his light hunting clothes; his host's nephew, Artochmes, met him, as they'd agreed the evening before, by the fountain in the court, bringing bow and arrows for himself, and spears for the Athenian. A cheerful lad, Artochmes, with his scarlet boots and coat, and his bright yellow trousers, and the big, prick-eared hounds with gilt collars jumping all round him and licking his hands. They started off on foot, with only one servant to carry the game. 'That's the right way, isn't it?' asked the young Persian, and Pheidon answered, rather untruthfully, 'Yes, it's our way in Hellas.' But certainly it was a day for running up and down after the hounds, a spring day, full of flowers and light clouds and the hills all round standing up clear in the sun, and a glitter of quartz pebbles round one's feet. They started a hare, and Artochmes waited till Pheidon had cast and missed before he shot himself and brought it tumbling to a stop against the rocks. After that, they went higher, over a little spur of hillside, and took breath for a minute at the top; almost at their feet lay a deep hollow of forest, short golden-green pines mostly, and once, above some year-cool water, a tall and rejoic-

ing dozen of planes with clean trunks and a flicker of delicate young leaves. Beyond, there were hills, and more hills, and in five places the cool and lively sparkle of a spring waterfall, patches of crocus gold, and scarlet anemones you could see a mile off.

'Yes, I know,' said Pheidon suddenly, 'but I want the sea to make it quite right.'

'The sea? But it's so strange, so – lonely!' Artochmes answered in his scarcely halting Greek, then, smiling at his guest, 'But you – ? It can be loved, then?'

'We're never out of sight of it at home, hardly out of hearing; even when one goes right up into the hills, there's always just that glimpse of blue at the end of the valley. My farm – one stands by the ox-byre and looks straight out over to Salamis, the whole bay all a-murmur at one's feet! But I mustn't talk about Salamis bay!'

'Oh, our little expedition! We've forgotten that here. And you've forgotten it also, I hope – you should, I think, on your way to His Excellence! But I hope you will be successful, Pheidon; if once you can get an audience you should be certain, but there are so many doors to be opened.'

'One hears that; but it's a stiff door gold won't grease. Of course I'm trusting in your uncle: will he help me, Artochmes?'

'I wonder! But you can be hopeful, I know. Only take care not to cross him. At least he does not love the Spartans – their brute of a king! – don't you think, Pheidon? But perhaps they are not the

king's friends who have gone on the same errand as yours.'

'One wolf's as bad as another, even when he says he's a lamb. Besides, Agesilaus knows what the Ephors are doing, you can lay your money on that!'

'They must be terrible neighbours!' said Artochmes sympathetically. 'Well, shall I loose the hounds now?'

Pheidon wondered how much he could go on all that, whether the uncle Cherasmis, his host, was really favourable; such a great deal depended on these little things – the news he would take home to Athens! They killed again in the forest, two small deer, a sort that Pheidon had never seen before. It was beautiful after those weeks of travel, jogging along on a dusty pack-horse, to get deep into dappled oak shadows, run on wet grass, and throw a straight spear again. At midday they found a hollow of shade and running water and ate largely, dried fruit and bread and some of their own game, both forgetting for the day all their differences of race and feeling. They got back late in the afternoon, Pheidon just tired enough to take all the possible pleasure out of a long bath, Artochmes pretending to be perfectly fresh, carrying a cock pheasant he'd shot himself. As he was going in, he called across, 'Oh, we've got a nice surprise for you this evening, Pheidon!' And Pheidon, just to be on the safe side, went to supper armed, with a sound mistrust of barbarian surprises.

However, the supper was as good as ever, almost too good; there wasn't anything one knew, and such a lot of spices and flavours, it was more like eating a set of poems than roast mutton or whatever it was they

started from! And old Cherasmis had trotted out all his gold and silver and embroidered couch covers and funny slaves for his Athenian guest; Pheidon stared between mouthfuls and decided he was not impressed. But the wine: ah, that was a different matter. It was not like his own home-grown drink from the vines at the back door; it was distinctive, interesting, alluring, it had a fascination: it curled round one's heart, one would like to dance: one would talk to that nice, plump little girl over in the corner: who said Persian was a difficult language? – one could talk it perfectly, perfectly. . . . Artochmes, on the other hand, was not drunk. He caught his uncle's eye with a slightly amused embarrassment: they were both used to their own wine. Pheidon, with the girl on his knee shouted over, 'Is this your surprise?' but didn't wait for an answer. She was soft and snuggled against him and smelt of some agreeable perfume. Cherasmis considered them indulgently: 'He's had a long journey, poor young man, and I suppose you ran up and down fifteen hills with him to-day, Artochmes.'

'And, uncle dear, he began to talk about Salamis!'

Well after midnight Pheidon decided to go to bed in his own room, which opened off the main court of the house. There were two or three slaves ready to take him there, but he went dignifiedly by himself. There was a lighted lamp hanging over the bed, and he suddenly thought how much good oil had been wasting in it all this time. He sat down sleepily, bidding take off his sandals to a boy who knelt in front of him, another of his host's slaves; then, 'No, stupid!

Put 'em on the chest where I'll find 'em in the morning. Now get me another blanket – no, my cloak, it's as cold as hell up here these nights.' All at once he noticed he had been speaking Greek, not Persian: 'You understand me?' he asked. 'Thoughtful man, Cherasmis! Where are you from?' Then, louder, as he got no answer. 'Are you a Hellene? Well, where from, can't you speak?'

'From over-sea,' said the boy sullenly, at last. 'Is there anything more you want?'

Pheidon scratched his head, trying vaguely to place the voice, then suddenly, 'You're a Dorian, of course. Here, stand up and let me look at you.' Then, coming rather more awake, 'What a very barbarian idea to stick chains on to a nice boy like you!' There were thin chains between neck and both wrists; he leant forward and tapped them with his nail, and all at once tried to snap one between his hands.

'Don't, don't!' cried the slave, backing away. 'They'll think it was me! Won't you go to bed?'

'No,' said Pheidon, rather obstinately. 'What's your name?'

'Chromis,' said the boy.

'Chromis, nonsense,' said the Athenian, 'not with that silly accent of yours. No, nor your way of saying it! What is it really?'

The boy chucked his head back and half shut his eyes in sign of complete refusal.

Pheidon stroked his beard and grinned, feeling like a hunter. The more the boy valued it, the more he was not going to be let keep it! Like a girl. Also there was

pure curiosity. Why, with a Hellene at least, all this fuss about one's name? 'Very well, I shall have to call someone to put some manners into you. Hadn't you better answer?' He waited a minute.

The boy glanced once at the drawn curtain over the door and then stayed rather still; he knew by now never to move his hands, because of the hateful catch and tinkle of the chains. But gradually Pheidon's teasing and malicious grin bored though the mask he was used to holding. It was late at night and there wasn't any refuge. Better get it over at once and be let go back to shame and darkness, not have the Persians in with lights and whips!

'I'm Kleas. There. Kleas, son of Diphridas!'

'And your state?'

Here the boy hesitated a little longer and then stamped: 'Sparta. So now you've got it!'

Pheidon grabbed him: 'No, you can't go yet. What are you – Messenian, half-and-half? Don't start crying, silly, I shan't hurt you.'

'I'm not a Messenian, I'm a citizen, at least my father – Oh, you beast, I knew you'd find out!'

'I see. You might pour that water-jug over my head. No, right over. Thanks.' He sat up, dripping. 'I suppose you're the nice surprise. Funny people these Persians are. Were you sent to me specially?' Kleas nodded. 'Tell me why you're here, and for any sake stop crying if you are a Spartiate!'

'Pirates,' the boy said, rubbing his eyes. 'We were down on the beach at Gytheum. Four years back. Me and two others. After that –' He just shuddered at it

– still. Then swallowed and went on: 'Nobody knew, I think. I wasn't ransomed. Now you're pleased, let me go!'

'No. Why are you chained – did you run away? I see. I'm going to think, Kleas, keep quiet.'

It was nine years ago he was thinking of and the grin was wiped off his face and he stiffened and hardened as Kleas watched him, quite still, and afraid of something he could not foresee happening suddenly. And Pheidon, tense-minded, had gone back to Athens, then. He had been a young man. He had just begun to feel he could be part of the glory when it had all been blotted out. That black night when the news had come to Athens and he and his brother went out into the streets and looked up, and there she was still, the Maiden in her marble house, not knowing, not knowing, those pale and flawless pillars in the starlight. Then the dragging out of their dead, hungry waiting for the doom of Sparta – and when it came – he having to help to pull down the long Walls, the sign in little of their lost, proud Empire, with Spartan soldiers laughing, Athene in rags with all the world spitting at her!

So, looking back, he remembered clearly the choking hate that had filled him; how, now that it was too late, he would have died happily to kill one of them. Yet when he searched in his heart, looking for it to show, he found it was lost. But surely it was reason that a hate like that could not burn out in nine years, nine years of such an unreal peace! He looked coldly across at the Spartan Kleas. Yes, Artochmes had thought, very justly, that he would like to see his enemy in

chains, would like perhaps to hurt him, curse him anyhow. It was no doubt a kindly thought of the Persians', meant to show they were really friends. God damn all barbarians!

'Kleas,' he said, 'how do I know you're a citizen?'

'You want to say you've seen a citizen like – this! Well, I won't help you, you drunk pig of an Athenian!'

'You're wrong. I'm not drunk now – Hellene.'

The boy whispered back at him: 'Do what you want, quick. You've got me.' Then, twisting his hands, 'Oh why, what is it? Is there a change in Hellas? Are – aren't we enemies?'

'Change – no. There is still peace between my state and yours. You don't believe in the peace, Kleas? Well, nor do some others. But I –' he startled himself by saying – 'I think there are enough barbarians left in the world to fight!'

'Are you sure?' said Kleas, shivering. 'Will you be sure in the morning?'

'Probably not. But in the meantime, are you a citizen?'

'Zeus, keeper of oaths, curse me with a Sending if I do not speak truth. My father Diphridas was a citizen and own cousin to King Agesilaus. You're not satisfied. Listen then: only a citizen can learn these: "Laws that are written: Laws for the eyes, Heart unsmitten. Lamp that's litten Droops and dies. So learn, my children! Thou and thy brother Mete and share The corn-bright mother: One to another equal heir. So learn, my children! Roof and rafter The axe shall smoothe, Stranger's laughter –" '

'Oh stop!' said Pheidon. 'Even I've had old Lycurgus rubbed into me till I'm sick of him, and you must find him even worse! I'll take it you're speaking truth. Now, what are you worth to these damned Persians?'

'I – I don't know. They like making a helot of me; they thought you would. So did I.'

'I tell you, Kleas, I wouldn't care two hoots if it hadn't been just here with that cheery old bird Cherasmis talking as if he were a gentleman, and then finding someone – yes, you are a bit of a surprise, my child! Now, get along off to bed and don't say anything to anybody, and I'll see what I can do.'

'Oh – oh – are you laughing at me? I can't tell – I haven't seen a Hellene for three years!'

'You needn't think all the world's got your Spartan sense of humour. I'm perfectly serious. And don't please start crying again, even if it is two in the morning!'

Pheidon woke up rather late the next day, feeling as if he had been having a bad dream. Then he remembered, got slowly out of bed, and drank a large cupful of water. And the moral, he thought, is no more Persian wine: or at least not no more, but not so much; and I suppose I've got to do something about that boy: proper fool I shall look going about this business with a Spartan! It was so funny, in fact, that he laughed, and then Artochmes came in. He said nothing of interest for a little, but was quite embarrassingly friendly with plans for the day. 'I've got to get on,' said Pheidon. 'If you spoil me so much I'll stay all my life and then you'll be sorry!' He fastened his belt.

'The horses will have had a good rest.' After a little the Persian asked him what he thought of the surprise. 'Oh,' Pheidon answered carefully, 'it was most thoughtful of you. You meant to suggest him for my interpreter? I do agree, the man I've got is a perfect idiot. What price will your uncle take? Not a present, mind!'

Artochmes seemed startled: 'But – oh, that was not what we meant! You liked to see him in chains, Pheidon – after Aigospotami!' Pheidon misunderstood him again, a little obviously perhaps. Artochmes was hurt, he couldn't make his guest out – he thought he had been so tactful, he wanted the Athenian to see that. What sort of a man was it who didn't like revenge when the Gods had so plainly given it to him! But, as Pheidon insisted, he went reluctantly to ask his uncle, and came back after a time with a regretful face. 'I'm sorry, Pheidon,' he said, 'but my uncle wants fifty minas for him.'

Pheidon jumped. 'Does your uncle think I'm made of gold? The boy's not worth five!'

'Yes, I know,' said Artochmes gently, 'but you see my uncle does not wish to sell him; neither do I.' He looked down at the ground, nice but unhelpful; he did not add that of course Kleas was not really for sale: it was much too pointed and continuous an amusement, one of the unconquerable Spartans! Besides, the boy was a pretty creature in himself: but that was Artochmes' private opinion which he had confided to no one as yet. Pheidon reluctantly put his arm round the Persian's neck: 'Now go and ask your uncle for a real price; I know you're my friend.'

The moment Artochmes was gone he began to count his money; there were some ten minas of his own, and nearly a talent of gold that had been trusted to him – for greasing stiff gates. It was ridiculous of course. Then suddenly Kleas himself slipped in, barefoot and silent, carrying white bread and a little fresh cheese bedded in leaves. 'I don't think I shall be able to do anything,' said Pheidon abruptly. The Spartan nodded, biting his lips. 'You see, they're asking fifty minas for you.'

'Father would pay you back!' said Kleas all in a flash like a snake flicking its tongue.

'Yes, but in the meantime I haven't got it. At least it's State money that I can't spend on this.'

'No. But – but – oh, couldn't you let them know at home that I'm not well dead and buried, but here alone among the barbarians dying by little bits!' Pheidon saw no very possible way of doing so, but promised, looking at the boy. Persian fashion, and very cruelly, he was dressed in a sort of mockery of Doric clothes, with a sham helmet and breastplate of stiff linen covered with gilt paint; it seemed funny that such an aching voice sould come out of it.

Artochmes, coming in, saw the boy at once, and spoke to him in sharp and rapid Persian that Pheidon could not follow; for answer he fell on his knees a moment, his head at Artochmes' feet, and would have hurried out, but Pheidon got tight hold of his wrist, then smiled with an effort at the Persian: 'And what does my host say now?'

'I am so sorry, so sorry; but the price is still the

same. Of course that is just a refusal. I cannot do anything, my Pheidon.'

'Well,' said Pheidon, 'if you will send me along one of your stewards, I will count him the price.'

'No, no!' cried Artochmes. 'You see yourself, surely, the price was only my uncle's way of denial! You must not cross him, Pheidon, remember what depends!'

Pheidon felt the boy's wrist quite still and stiff under his hand, and laughed. 'I'm sure nobody need be angry at this bargain if I'm not. My dear Artochmes, don't look like that! Don't you know all Hellenes are mad!' Then, as they were alone again, he finished the sentence: 'Since Thermopylæ.' And turned to Kleas: 'You won't kiss any more Persians' feet now, little brother.'

Kleas said nothing for a minute or two, and then, Spartan fashion, not much, but enough to satisfy Pheidon very well – as far as that went. But the money he had to pay was real enough. He tried not to think of it yet; it did no good.

Cherasmis did not mention the matter when they were saying good-bye; he was the same kindly, ornate, powerful old man as ever. But Artochmes came up to the horses: 'I should warn you of something,' and his eyebrows twitched just a little. 'My uncle is not pleased: he may send a – a Sending – to bring Kleas back. I hope not of course, but – well, I am so sorry, you know. I hope you had a good day's sport with me, Pheidon; I was so happy myself. And all success to you, of course!' He waved his hand, and Pheidon gaily waved his. But once they were out of sight he

trotted on ahead of his two servants and asked Kleas what the Persian meant. Kleas opened his mouth to speak, and failed, and tried again: 'It's magic.'

'Disgusting,' said Pheidon, very civilized.

But Kleas shook his head: 'I've seen it happen. I have. Really. They kill a bird, I think; and there's something else. If it comes – oh Pheidon, save me from that too!'

'Of course I shall,' said Pheidon, 'I don't want to waste my money.'

Nothing happened that night, or the night after. But the third night Pheidon woke suddenly with a bumping heart; they were all sleeping on heaps of straw in the dark covered court of an inn; he snatched a lamp off the wall and pulled out the wick and ran over to Kleas. The boy's face was screwed up round tight-shut eyes, and he was making a thin squeaking noise like a bat. Pheidon shook him, whispering, 'Wake up, wake up!' anxious not to rouse his own servants; but Kleas twisted about in the straw, clenching and unclenching his fists. After a moment he managed to speak, but in Persian: 'It's come. And I can't open my eyes.' Pheidon put his hands on the boy's face and spoke in clear and imperative Greek: 'You can open your eyes. You must. You will.' And after a struggle the eyes opened and the hands slackened again.

'It had me,' whispered Kleas, staring up from the straw, 'it got me with its hands.' And then would say nothing more, but lay limp and sweating quietly, harking back all the time to the vision of the thing he had

fought with. The day after he said very little, only looked about him a great deal, even when they were right out in the open; and in the afternoon asked Pheidon if he could see any large birds anywhere near: 'Because I hear a noise like wings.' That evening they got to an inn much like the last, but dirtier; when the others settled down to sleep, he sat up with his back against a pillar.

'Nonsense,' said Pheidon. 'You can't do without sleep.'

'If I sleep it comes.'

'Well, I'm just beside you; you can wake me.'

The boy shook his head, but lay down. The same thing happened that night, but he was harder to wake, and the terror was still visibly with him till dawn. 'Tell me what it's like,' said Pheidon, but got no clear idea except that it pulled with its hands and there were rather too many of them.

That day Kleas was thirsty, but couldn't eat. In the evening they came to a town at the foot of some large hills that cut the light off half an hour before sunset. Again Pheidon, who was tired, went to sleep before Kleas, and when he woke in the dawn thought everything had been all right; but turning over, saw he was alone. He went straight for the horses and found Kleas saddling one. 'You dare!' he said, and pulled him inside the house. Kleas beat his head on the ground: 'I must go back!' he sobbed, 'I must. It'll go on coming, I can't bear it! You didn't help last night. Let me go, Pheidon, please let me go!'

'I'll see all Persia at the bottom of the sea first!' said

Pheidon, shaking him, 'Apollo Apotrapaios! Get up, and try to remember you're a Hellene, not a miserable barbarian!' Then he took Kleas off with him to the market-place and bought a young slave from the hills; then he made them change clothes, and all that morning called the slave Kleas, and Kleas by a barbarian name that at least made them both laugh. At noon he stopped in a thicket by a spring for food, and let the new boy, who was very hungry, eat and drink as much as he liked, and then fall asleep. Then he and Kleas and the two bewildered servants tiptoed away, carefully keeping off the boy's shadow, and mounted and galloped out of sight. 'We'll see what your Sending makes of that,' said Pheidon, and began to sing; and presently Kleas was singing too.

The nearer they got, the more the money began to weigh on Pheidon; and also on Kleas, who had a thorough respect for State property. When they'd arrived Pheidon looked for cheap lodgings and sold their horses: 'If I'm successful I'll get as good without paying, and if I'm not, I may just as well walk back.' Then he began to stir things up. He told Kleas very fairly what he was trying to do, but to the boy, who still often went back in dreams to slavery, it had an unreal quality; even the leaders on the two sides were not all the same as they'd been. And besides he liked Pheidon himself so much; as the Athenian never laid stress on being really his owner, he was prepared to do anything for him, and loved walking about with him, feeling that now at last he could be proud of being a Hellene among barbarians.

For some days Pheidon thought things were going badly; he needed the money, and also that promised help from Cherasmis, which was not forthcoming; and naturally he was cross with Kleas. Then one evening he met a man – who knew another man – who would ask him to supper the very next day with two or three of the really important people. He sacrificed and went, anxiously. But it was a success; he could feel he was saying the right things, that paths were opening before him. He turned to his neighbour: 'No, everything's clear at my end. You needn't be anxious, Timokrates. Though of course we like things nicely done in Athens – nothing obvious, you know!' Timokrates laughed: 'Yes, I've got just the same feeling myself – the merest chink tells everything to a sensible man! Now in Sparta I should have to name a figure! You've seen the Spartans about here?'

'No,' said Pheidon, considering, and then explained about Kleas.

Neither Pheidon nor Kleas had foreseen the difficulty of getting fifty minas out of the Spartan mission, even when one of them was a friend of Diphridas, and engaged to take the boy back safe and act as guardian to him till he was home. Pheidon compromised rather angrily for half a talent and two serviceable pack-horses, and Kleas was thoroughly ashamed. His father was apparently in command of a regiment with Agesilaus, and he was to be taken there; he hoped they would not be fighting against Athens yet, he wanted the peace to last. And Pheidon had made him swear to tell nothing of what he knew about the successful supper party.

He began to tie his bundle up, trying to be as slow as he could; he didn't want to leave Pheidon, knowing that once he was back with his Spartan elders there'd be no more laughing and singing, and pleasant, casual, grown-up talk for him. 'I expect I'll be sent back to my Class,' he said, 'and I shan't see you again for years and years, Pheidon; I am sorry.'

'Whenever there's peace you can always come and see me in Athens,' said Pheidon, also regretful. 'Your proxenos would show you my house.'

'But they won't let me. Not till I've finished my training. And then we'll both be old and different.'

'Come before that, Kleas; you're not going to be glued down to Taygetus, are you? Perhaps . . . in a few years.'

'But I'll have to do what I'm told.'

'Good lord, I should have thought you'd had enough of that!' Pheidon laughed at him. 'But I understand. Well, even if there's war for a time, still some day all we Hellenes may have more than the Gods in common. Salamis again! Or am I all wrong, Kleas?'

COMING INTO THE BAY

It was going to be sunset. And between me and the coast,
Between the grey-blue, live sea and the grey, soft mountains,
There was a blue and golden haze.
And the sun was just above Tainaron, a throbbing flame to stare at,
And every moment the haze grew brighter.
North was Taygetos, a veiled and pointed distance:
There in a little while stars would rise:
And the low, broad, kindly valley of Sparta.
Behind us Kythera was rose-coloured and lovely
And the edges of the waves were rose-coloured too.
It was all better than I had remembered,
And I was going home.

THE EPIPHANY OF POIEËSSA

On the far side of Poieësa the cliffs dropped down, barren and rocky, into deep sea. There was nothing to be done with them, not enough soil to make clearing and terracing worth while. Only in spring they made sheep pasture, and for a few weeks bees came there in steady three-mile flights from the valley farms. Then April hardened and dried into summer and autumn, till not even the lean goats could find a sprig of green to crunch, and the prickly low bushes dried brown and the thistles golden yellow, and nothing was left alive but ants and little beetles, and roots and seeds heat-stricken and sleeping heavily as the Corn Gods sleep from death to rebirth, and all night long the earth-born, earth-coloured crickets, rejoicing and undisturbed. Only in one place the jagged slope of the cliffs was broken by a small cleft wriggling snake-fashion up among the rocks, tinkling and watery and delicious in the first awakening after winter, but later so dry that one could scarcely have guessed there could ever be anything there but rocks and stones and a few angular spiky bushes with surprising bright pea flowers on them, but not leaf enough to shadow a fly. Where this cleft opened out to the sea there was a small beach of coarse sand and shingle, shut in by huge fantastic rocks

like dragons turned to stone and then broken and wave-worn a thousand years.

Except for the herd boys in spring, no one ever came there from the rest of Poieëssa. Why should they? This side of the island hunched itself out of the sea, barren and uninviting, to ships out of Mytilene for Poieëssa. It offered them no shelter, but blew hot and sudden land winds into their slack sails at evening. Dawn rippled emptily blue and gold against rocks and shingle. Noon made thick purple shadows down from the jagged tops to the misty hollows of the base.

Timagoras, who was called Timas for short by those who loved him, Timas the eldest son of Alxenor, came here from time to time and sat in the sun bare-headed with contracted pupils, thinking. He used to go there years ago as a boy, trying to get away from the various things he feared and hated: first the two uncles who were his guardians, each of whom he liked, quarrelling over him, both trying to make him see the world differently: and then his father, come back from the wars in Asia, violently and nervously loving him, pulling at his mind and emotions till he could not bear it. Later still, when his father married again and the tension relaxed that much, though he got on very well with his step-mother, who was nearer his own age than his father's, he still wanted to get away from home a great deal, to get away from his friends too, from any human company, when he felt his queer, suppressed agonies of bad temper coming on. When he was grown-up he saw that he could blame his father and uncles for that, for bringing

him up with so much emotional violence, and yet he could understand that it was not really their faults, but just the circumstances he had been thrown into by the difficult years of his childhood, in the middle of wars and passions and changes. Anyway the mischief was done.

And so he was left, as on this autumn morning, crouching and tense on the top of a cairn that someone a very long time ago had piled on that fantastic northern sky-line of Poieëssa, staring down at empty sea. Far north the shadowy peaks of Lesbos bounded the emptiness, yet seemed too transparent to hold back even a ranging thought.

Timas was dry and sun-steeped and brown, his light tunic was as loose on him as a passing wind, or the dry curls of his brown hair above his forehead. He had come here first to think over a marriage his friends were trying to arrange for him, or rather two possible alternatives of marriage. One was with his cousin Alkyo, Eupaides' younger daughter, whom he had known all her life, ever since the day she was born when he had first held her in his arms. Alkyo at least knew him pretty well, enough to let him alone in his tempers and not to expect too much from him; he knew she wasn't a fool either, that the Gods were much the same to her as they were to him, beautiful perhaps, but mostly laughable and evil. And she was tall and pretty, and he had pulled her hair lately enough to know it was long and thick and all her own. And Rodokleia liked her. And the money would be all right. But – but – he remembered uncomfortably again a grin seen out of

the corner of his eye one day he had been talking to her father and she came past. And if Eupaides became his father-in-law as well as his uncle and ex-guardian – ! He would be shoved into politics, into taking his share of all the boredom and pretence of governing this little island, which was really always changing hands between the big Powers, Athens and Sparta and Persia, with no will of its own nowadays, but a great capacity for making fine resolutions and carving them on imported marble! He would have to take some ridiculous job of looking after the bakers' shops or the harbour dues, like his father had, even if he got someone else to do all the work. This last seemed to him reasonable, but would involve endless arguments with his other uncle Chromon! No, cousin Alkyo could make a better marriage.

Then there was old Nikanor's daughter Alexandra, whom everyone said was such a marvellous musician. She was pretty enough too, but he heard she wrote poetry; she would be sure to have some wonderful new ideas about love, want to lay hands on all that part of his soul that he was not ever going to let anyone touch again. Better Alkyo laughing at him than that. Oh why need they always be clamouring at him to marry! Other men of thirty were let alone to do as they liked. What was the use of all this passion for keeping on, that one did not feel in oneself, but that other people tried to put there! He discovered himself angry, beginning to hammer one stone on another, and deliberately relaxed, sent his mind hunting back to that strange place of peace it had: the Sparta of a child's memory,

green and quiet or green and laughing, full of trees and high tasselled reed beds, and corn and vines and olives and small gay flowers just right for a child's bunch; and lots of other boys. Other big, brave boys doing things all together in beautiful, sweeping crowds, with no love, no feelings demanded of them towards their elders, doing as they liked among themselves, no only children. A lovely, free place, where one could be brave and generous and good-tempered quite simply, by oneself – all as different, he supposed, from the real Sparta as a child's mind from a grown man's! And he laughed at his own secret place, but quite gently, and got up, and lifted his eyes to the light-filled and godless heaven above Poieëssa, and then turned south again towards the dry and prickly ridges and the hardly-marked path that led across them among the boulders, back to the earthy valleys, and his own farm.

Someone was coming towards him, a flutter of pale colour against the brown and speckled hill-side. He waited a minute and then saw for certain that it was his half-sister Rodokleia. He hailed, and heard her shrill, breathless hail back, and then started running towards her.

This was the occasion. Rodokleia was one of the young priestesses who wove and embroidered for the island Goddess, Hera of Poieëssa, making Her new robes for every year, with the traditional patterns and colourings that none of them now quite knew the meaning of, and taking care of the old ones, worn delicate and cobwebby, that lay, untouched by moth or ants in the heavy lidded chest of Her treasury. For Hera of

Poieëssa had the shape of a square thin pillar, incised with wavy lines, standing on a base of olive wood and topped with a smiling, staring, stone face, smaller than life and stiller and more dreadful, with holes drilled in it to take the gold crown and the veil over the crimped stone hair. And Timas, who believed in no God, was yet obscurely and ancestrally afraid of this and hated it, and felt that the hate was twisting him about and stopping him from clear thought. Now the time was come when the Goddess left her temple on the high sanctuary above Poieëssa harbour, and was taken by the priestesses to bathe in the sea and renew her youth and end the droughts and heat and stay Virgin through cold and cleansing winter, till spring came and she was married again for the thousandth time and again became Teleia, the perfected and fruitful. This bath of Hera happened on the sea-shore at a different place every year, but always in some small deserted indent of the coast and mostly along these northern cliffs: always at new moon. Here her old clothes were taken off and she was carried naked and stony into the sea, and lay naked on the shore to dry, and was carried back at dawn wrapped only in a veil, with squealing flutes that went before her to warn men and boys out of her path. That day she rested, and the next day was holiday and she was shown to the people in her new dress. And it came to Timas that if he could see this comic and savage rite and the unclothed Hera as the square stone he knew her for, he would allay the fear and hate and could set his mind to work again.

Rodokleia was very young and very fond of her step-

brother and always wanted to do things for him; but there was so seldom anything she could do. And now it seemed there was. Would she be a silly ungrateful coward and not remember how nice Timas had always been to her though he was a man and she only a little girl, or would she be brave and rational as he wanted her to be, and believe him when he said there was no harm in his knowing or seeing since it was not out of mere curiosity he asked her, but because he loved wisdom and must see all things plain? The night before she had a dream in which she was at home, only much littler because she was still playing with her dolls, and Nurse came and called her to bed before it was dark, and began to bath her, and then Timas came in, as he often had in those days, and showed her a ship he was making her. After that, it seemed quite clear that the Goddess had given her permission to be seen. So she came running over the hills to tell him that that bath of Hera was to be to-night on the beach below the cliffs where he had been watching. Then they walked back together to the farm, he talking of wisdom and the order of things, and she half-listening and half-dreaming of all this which she was to be and do that night. He stayed at the farm, reading one of the new books he was always getting from Athens, while she and her nurse went on mule-back down along the valley to Poieëssa town, between the stripped vines and the hot, sweet fig trees with twisted stems and a few figs still that they could reach up to pluck.

In the priestesses' house, between the Temple and the treasury of the Goddess, Rodokleia found the other

five girls all washing and doing their hair, or just waking up from their afternoon sleep. Only Nikaro, the Queen Priestess of Hera, Nikaro-Teleia, was dressed and walking in the Sanctuary, under the olive row, from the well to the Temple steps and back again, with her long, beautiful hands slack at her sides. When Nikaro was not there the others always started talking about her sooner or later, and why she wouldn't marry, though she had been a priestess for twelve years, ever since she was fourteen. 'And if she goes on much longer,' said the eldest of the girls, pinning up her black curls, 'she'll be done. She'll get – oh horrid, like the old sweeper women who clean out the peacocks' cage! I mean, she'll be a dear still and we shall all go on loving her, but what's the good of that? And it's so silly. It isn't as if she was priestess in Samos or Delos or anywhere that matters.'

The others laughed; her father was proxenos for half the islands and she always managed to trot it out somehow. 'All the places you're going to marry the fattest pastry-cook in!' giggled one of the others, Meoné, over the edge of her mirror.

'Well, all the same,' said the black-curled Philistion, 'nobody outside the island's ever heard of our Hera. She can't do anything important in the big world. Though of course I like being priestess: it shows these young puppies one's a lady!'

'And it does help with one's dowry,' said small Rodokleia, half to herself; she had heard it rather often at home.

'Speak for yourself, child!' said Philistion sharply,

and then laughed: 'and besides, I feel I'm someone now! You ought to see me at home talking to my brothers! Mother just can't do a thing with me these days, she always says so!'

'And besides –' said Rodokleia.

'Besides what?'

But Rodokleia blushed and couldn't go on. She was thinking of Hera as a strong and aware Goddess, all about them even when they were not actually in her presence. But kind, oh surely kind to her maidens! And what had Timas quite meant by asking her to tell about to-night and not be afraid of something that no one did more than pretend to be frightened of? Wasn't everyone properly and rightly afraid? Or could they all be pretending, as he said? Philistion . . . well, Philistion didn't care quite the same way; she might laugh at one. She was the eldest anyhow, and had such lots of outside things to think of. It was difficult to understand; why bother when there was Nikaro. One was sure and happy thinking about her. Nikaro was different from everyone. But why wouldn't she marry all the same? It must be good to be married and safe and have darling babies. Nothing could make up for that.

Philistion finished dressing and went on about the Queen Priestess: 'They say her father tried time and again to get her to marry, before he died, poor man. But of course he couldn't actually force her. Though I'm sure he must have been weak about it. And now Nauphilos is after her and swearing all over the town he'll have her sooner or later, and she had him up here yesterday and turned him down in less than two

minutes! I wouldn't dare with a man like Nauphilos! Even if he is your cousin, Rodokleia, I must say he's a tough customer.'

'He isn't my cousin,' said Rodokleia, 'he's only father's first wife's brother's son, and I don't count that! I think he's just like a mad bull, myself, and I know father does, but all the same he looks rather nice.'

'Oh he's fascinating! I don't know what I should do if he wanted me. Look at the time he climbed into the Persian Ambassador's window!'

'And the time he went banging into the Assembly,' said one of the other priestesses, 'and told them they were a lot of old fools!'

'And so they are,' said Philistion, tossing her curls, 'who cares! But I saw him with my own eyes climb up at the back part of the theatre and walk along the parapet!'

'He made a funny speech, didn't he?'

'Yes, but father wouldn't let me stay. Do you think he'll climb up here one fine night and carry off Nikaro?'

'Don't be silly,' said Rodokleia, 'the Goddess wouldn't let him.'

The others laughed and went on with their hair dressing. By and by, Philistion came back to it: 'But I do wonder how she stays looking as she does year after year. It's not natural. When a woman's over twenty she doesn't step like that and her skin begins to go and her eyes. But Nikaro never seems to get any older. Of course if Hera were to give me that, I should think twice about getting married too!'

When they were all dressed and ready they went out into the Sanctuary, blinking at the light. Beyond their

low walls, set about with pots of basil and tansy and mint, the rock dropped sharply, on one side towards Poieëssa town and harbour with the shadow of their hill beginning to fall on it, on another two to deep blue open sea, and on the fourth to the biggest and most fertile plain on the island: dotted with trees, and farms with barns and wells, and vines, and autumn-bare corn fields, sloping up into the hills, losing itself in narrow terraced valleys, lined from village to village with deep, twisting, dust-white lanes, and wide, dry stream-beds. Looking there, the girls felt it blessed, and grew quiet, and drew together into a line, all holding hands.

Two other women, older than the priestess maidens, and less well born, came to the ends of the line, their double flutes hanging by ribands from their necks, waiting. No one was garlanded, for this secret and curious rite. Not until the re-birth had become plain. Then came a low call from the Temple, as of a woman weary and in pain, and moving forward they felt their nerves pricked with some forewarning and dizzied with the four notes of the flutes, up and down, up and down. They went through the accustomed, cool dark of the Temple, to the innermost shrine where Hera of Poieëssa waited for them, Hera Teleia, and beside her the Queen Priestess, Nikaro-Hera, with her eyes fixed.

Philistion drew her hand away from the girl beside her and spoke to the image, with her head bent and palms outward: 'Teleia, Teleia, your veil is heavy on your head.'

And Nikaro-Hera answered with the voice of the Goddess: 'Heavy, heavy.'

Then Philistion drew the veil up from the face and over the points of the crown and off the cold stone hair, and Nikaro-Hera held it a moment over her breast and then put it aside. The next priestess asked for, and took off, the crown itself, that loosened rather dreadfully from the holes in the stone. The next priestess took the ear-rings, the next the brooch from the breast-folds of the tunic, which held their form a moment and then fell loose; last, Rodokleia took the girdle, which was made of broad, flat, gold faces, linked together by their hair. Then Nikaro-Hera stepped behind her image and lifted it straight up from its base and held it for a time right in front of her, then shifted it so that it lay in her arms like a stone baby, smiling cruelly and oddly up into her face. The others folded in the robes so that they should not trail. Seen like this, Hera was quite small. The flutes went in front of them, blowing a single note at every fourth step. They breathed more easily as they came out of the Temple. The intensest heat had gone out of the day; shadows were everywhere, deeper and cooler than the short noon ones. They took the sloping sacred way down the rock, past the peacocks' cage and the dripping cave of the Water Maidens, and down on to the plain with the sun on their left and rather ahead of them. One priestess walked on each side of Nikaro-Hera, the others behind. After about an hour she gave the image to the eldest priestess, who became for the moment Philistion-Hera, and walked herself on the right hand. In rather under an hour the second priestess took it, and so through the whole evening and the first part of the night that

followed. No one was on any of the roads they followed; shutters were across the windows of every farm they passed. Only at a cross-road they found the traditional four white mules tethered, so that the four girls behind could ride, very quietly, while the three in front walked. In this way they took turns with riding and walking and carrying, only the Queen Priestess, who was sometimes herself and sometimes Hera Teleia, walking all the way.

They climbed up out of cultivation and the path grew narrow and stony, so that the flute women must go in front, and then the Goddess, and the two on foot, and last the riders, sitting loosely on the sides of their wooden saddles, eyeing the stars that more and more filled their sight and minds as they came higher on to the hills, squares and patterns and zigzags across the sky, often seven together as they were. Then they came to the top and there was sea again ahead of them, dark and faintly moving in the starlight. It was midnight by the time they got down to the beach, and, as always for this, moonless. They rested for a few moments, loosening their sandals and stretching their dusty toes. The flute women lay down behind a rock, to sleep an hour or two. They set Hera's image up in the shingle, steadying it from the sides. It was very short like this, and the robes trailed on the beach. They knelt to come to its level. 'Teleia, Teleia,' they said, 'your dresses are old and worn. We will strip them off, off, and clothe you in shining water and the dew of the unwedded waves.'

And Nikaro-Hera answered them: 'I am weary of

the weight of my dresses and my slow limbs and my heavy breasts. I, Teleia, am weary of perfection and the heat of the ripe fruits. I bid you carry me into the bed of the cold waves.'

Then they stripped off the dresses, one by one, elaborately pinned and folded and fastened pleat to pleat in a fashion so old as to be scarcely comparable with their own. They laid them out over a rock, and two of them spread the great web of white linen new from the loom, to receive Teleia when she had become Parthenos.

Then they stripped, themselves, which was very pleasant to their tired bodies. One or two of them yawned and stretched arms and legs behind the backs of Hera Teleia and Nikaro-Hera. It was only then that Rodokleia remembered her step-brother and wondered if he were hiding anywhere near. She looked round at the rocks; but thousands of men might have hidden simply in the great inky shadows that shut in the bay all round. She didn't bother about it. Hera would not see either. How sleepy she was, and how the soft tickling night winds wrapped themselves about her legs and body!

There was scarcely enough movement in the sea to make waves, only the gentlest possible stirring among the pebbles, nothing to dim the soft ringing of the grasshoppers from the cliffs above them. The biggest stars made themselves paths along the water or, at the very stillest, reflected a single light, but paler and more diffuse than the sky one. Only as they went down to the water they saw other tiny lights in it and as they

waded out more and more, brighter and far more starry than the star reflections themselves. These little sparkles lasted only a moment, but flocks of them were born of every movement they made. Nikaro-Hera was shoulder deep now, with the naked image in her arms. She dipped it below the surface. It made a greyness against the shining of her body through the water. The others swam round or stood, rocking on their toes, chilled and excited. 'Wash away,' they chanted, 'waves wash away, wash away!' Whenever they swam the little lights fluttered brilliantly in the pale foam of their going. Rodokleia at least was a little frightened of the sparkles, which seemed to threaten her virginity, darting at her; she tried to shield her body with her hands but only made more below the surface from her moving. They swam again, clapping together their white arms and legs, feeling their loose hair twist like seaweed about their shoulders.

Then Nikaro-Hera shuddered and gave a little cry and they gathered round her. With one sudden heave she lifted the image out of the water, right out, on stretched and trembling arms, and all the others came under to support it. Together they made their way to shore, so amazingly joyful that they needs must laugh and sing aloud. They could not tell why this was joy, they did not stay to ask, only they knew that something was accomplished rightly, and sleepiness and heaviness and fear fell from them, and each one with her hands bearing up the Goddess felt herself through that touch become more virgin than she was, stronger-bodied, clearer-eyed, brighter-minded. 'Hera!' they cried one

to another, 'Hera Parthené!' And answered for her and themselves: 'I am light-foot, I am un-sought and untouched, I am the piper in the woods, I am the star that brings morning!'

So they came splashing and cold out of the shallows, with the pebbles gritting under their feet, and laid Hera, still dripping, on to her veil, and wrapped it over, with laughter and bounding steps. They dressed again, feeling their way into their air-cooled dresses, and kissed each other and laughed, all together, holding hands and dancing just as the mood took them, Nikaro-Parthenos and Rodokleia-Parthenos, and Meoné-Parthenos and Philistion-Parthenos, and the other three as well, all Maiden, none older or wiser or less merry than her fellows. Nikaro-Parthenos had tufts of seaweed in her hair and still a few of the sparkles; wordless, with a touch, she challenged Rodokleia-Parthenos to race her along the edge of the sea, and they ran through the dark with their arms out and forward pointing breasts. Others leapt the heaped web over the Goddess, higher and further every time, or whirled each other round or flapped wet hair across another's cheek. The flute women were still sleeping.

And then, dreadfully, something was on to them. Two of them were caught, the others ran screaming inward to the web. 'What are they?' sobbed Philistion, and in a voice that was both very frightening and very frightened Nikaro answered: 'Nauphilos!' And she snatched the image up in its web and held it shoulder high in front of her.

Rodokleia had been caught, but, shrieking and

twisting, she remembered one possible help and shouted 'Timas! Timas!' and struggled to keep the man who held her too busy to tie her hands and get away.

'Gently!' said the man. 'Gently! We shan't hurt you, maidens. You shall take the Goddess home all safe.'

'What do you want then?' gasped Rodokleia, trying to see every way at once through the dark, half transparent night.

Said the man: 'Nauphilos wants Nikaro, and by God he's getting her!'

'He isn't!' said Rodokleia, and bit the man's wrist and wrenched herself round to see.

First she could see men shouting and fighting, and shouted herself: 'Oh Timas! oh good!' and then she saw the other girls dimly struggling round the place where the Goddess was, and she saw Nikaro heave up the webbed image in her arms and bring it down on a man's head. Then they all fell together, she and the man and the Goddess, and Rodokleia was hard at her own fight again.

As suddenly as it had all started, it seemed to end. The face of the man who was holding her twisted from excitement into quick horror, and he threw her off so that she fell on hands and knees into the shingle. As she got up, she saw all the men running away into the deep shadows, and herself went as fast as she could over to the centre of things. There was Nikaro standing with her hands up over her ears, and Philistion trembling violently and lifting the web that Hera was in, and in front of them there was a dead man on

his face in the pebbles with his skull quite plainly smashed in.

Rodokleia stopped a pace or two away and her mouth began to turn down at the corners. Her half-brother came up and asked her if she could manage to bandage a cut on his leg. Luckily, none of the attackers had brought any weapons, so, except for Nikaro, it had all been hand to hand: Timas had fallen over a sharp rock. One of the priestesses, Meoné, had been tied up, and came limping over, crying, to have her wrists untied. Rodokleia contrived, rather clumsily, to do up the cut with a strip from her dress; she was badly shaken herself, and besides had to do it mostly by feeling. Then they both looked round. Nikaro and Philistion were unwrapping the web from the Goddess, kneeling in the shingle. It was very difficult to see their faces at all. Rodokleia came and knelt between them. They opened the last fold of the web. The image of Hera was fractured at the base of the neck. The two stone edges gritted against one another.

Nikaro looked up into the sky. The Bear hung very low, tilting into the sea; Orion was high and bright across the Milky Way. A very bright shooting star happened and disappeared. She moved towards the body. She and Timas turned it over and saw it was Nauphilos. One by one the other priestesses gathered round Hera, but not too near. The night oppressed them terribly. It seemed as if the flute women must have run away.

Suddenly Nikaro said, to anyone or everyone: 'What have I done? What happened?' Philistion would have

put her arms round the Queen Priestess, but Nikaro said sharply, 'No, no, keep away from me! I do not know if I am clean.' She went over and sat by the image, and the others scattered a little, into a trembling, breathing, dark half-circle in front of her. Timas stayed by the body of his cousin; his young fool of a cousin Nauphilos, Chromon's son, whom he'd half liked and half envied. And what would Chromon say about his eldest son, the boy he was so proud of, whom he'd hoped so much for, in spite of laughing at him and complaining of him? That, he knew, had been Chromon's way of keeping off ill-luck. Now it had come. Oh what would Chromon say and do? Timas was old enough to be able to enter with some accuracy into other people's minds and feelings. He stayed thinking of his violent, passionate uncle Chromon, until he heard his own name spoken.

It was Nikaro asking Rodokleia why he was there, and Rodokleia was sobbing and quite unable to explain. He came and stood beside her: 'I often come here,' he said, 'to think and watch the stars, by myself. Rodokleia knew that. It was fortunate.'

Nikaro and he could not see one another's faces across the space of dark. Someone had veiled the broken Hera again lest he should see her naked. He waited. At last Nikaro said: 'I see.' And then, to him: 'Can you tell me just what happened?'

He said: 'There were about ten of them. For that short time I was able to take on three; they were surprised, you see. I believe two or three were friends of his, and the others were slaves. He wouldn't be able

to get many respectable people to take a hand in this. When they saw he was struck and realized what had done it, the fear that had most likely been in their minds all the time got the better of them and they ran. The barbarians will stay frightened and hide, but his friends are as tough as he was and they'll get over it.'

'And then?' said Nikaro.

'Then,' said Timas abruptly, 'they'll think as I do that it's all folly and there never was anything to be frightened of!'

'All folly,' said Nikaro, 'yes. And then?'

'They'll call it murder. Keep quiet, Rodokleia! And Chromon will call it murder.'

'And my Goddess,' said Nikaro, in the same tone, 'Hera who is broken: what will they call that?'

'I don't know at all,' said Timas, 'but you see for yourself: she was only stone.'

Nikaro said: 'Ten minutes ago she was not stone; she was all of us, and through us all life. I have been Teleia and I was Parthenos then. I do not know what I am now.'

'The Gods come between us and Good,' said Timas. He could not see Nikaro. It was as long as hell between midnight and dawn. Already a great deal of his fear and hate of Hera were quenched. Still less did he hate the priestesses. But he wanted to see this woman's face. It was impossible to find out anything from her curiously level voice.

Rodokleia began to sob: 'It's all my fault! I had a dream – I thought Hera wouldn't mind –' and she

collapsed on to the neck of one of the others, trying to get refuge from dark and fear. But none of the rest, except perhaps Nikaro, noticed her. For each was searching her heart and her immediate past thoughts and deeds for the essentially unlucky thing.

Timas felt intensely sorry for them all; he tried to find them an excuse: 'Gods are the shapes and shadows of the divine movement,' he said, 'and sometimes the movement is towards goodness and beauty and the shape catches the perfect moment.'

Nikaro answered in a loud, astonished voice: 'But this was Hera of Poieëssa, and not any shadow!'

'If that was Hera of Poieëssa,' said Timas, irritated, 'she's dead now.'

'But she can not die.'

'Well,' said Timas, 'let her heal herself!' And he turned a grim shoulder towards Nikaro. It seemed to be getting a little lighter, not that the stars were any less bright and crowded, but there was a feeling of lifting in the air. He was more and more sorry for Chromon, with his son killed in this madness and folly. He began to consider what would happen and wondered if he had been recognized. It seemed probable and he was curiously unafraid at the prospect. There was nothing in life he set very much value on. Or would it be simpler to go away? But there was little Rodokleia crying still; he had definitely taken sides. He was the only man among these seven women and much older than any of them, even Nikaro. 'What are you going to do with your Goddess now?' he said.

Nikaro answered: 'The others shall take her home.

I make Philistion Queen, and during this coming day they shall call in another to make up their number. Philistion-Parthené, you know the rites?'

Philistion rose up from among the others, suddenly very dignified, and spread out her arms. 'I know,' she said, 'the Goddess comes – comes to me!'

'But oh, what are *you* going to do?' said Rodokleia, jumping up.

And Philistion, suddenly herself again, said: 'Yes, yes, Nikaro darling, where will you be?'

But Nikaro said: 'Let me be! Let me be!' And suddenly she turned and ran into the darkness. Timas ran after her a few yards, but lost her in the rocks. He came back to the others; they were wrapping the web in better order about Hera.

Philistion-Hera spoke to him: 'What will they do in the town?'

Timas said, 'Hera did the murder. This is the way of your Gods!' Then, more gently: 'In old days they would have thought that was the reality and left it as a judgment on the dead, but now they will say Nikaro is the murderer. I think Nikaro saw that and did not want to make you six in any way unclean.'

'But what will they do to her? Oh –' said Rodokleia, 'you don't know, Timas, she's so kind, I do love her, and it's all my fault!'

'Nonsense!' said Timas to this last, but tried to answer the question: 'They may send to Delphi to ask. Or – as it's Chromon – they may just try her for murder.'

'But you'll get her away!' said Rodokleia, and ran

up to him, clung round his neck, 'Oh dear, dear Timas, you will, won't you?'

Timas got her arms out of the way: 'Rodokleia, don't be a little fool! I don't even know where she is.'

'But what are we to do!' said Rodokleia.

Then Philistion said nervously, yet already with a curious authority: 'Rodokleia-Parthené, we are going now. The Goddess bids us take her home. I am her mouth.' They lifted Hera into her arms, and two went at each side and the other three behind. She called sharply for the flute women, but they were gone. 'Hera will protect herself,' she said. And they turned their backs to the sea and the body and Timas, and started for the path up the cliffs.

It was really day beginning now. The stars were paling and vanishing, and in the north-eastern corner of the bay small clouds of lit gold and lit rose floated above the horizon. Already Timas could see from end to end of the beach, could watch the priestesses going slowly up the cleft. He went to the body of his cousin and laid it straight on its back with its arms at its sides, and put two silver coins he had in his purse on to its eyes. There was nothing to be seen of Nikaro; for just a second he wondered if she could have turned into something, a swallow or a flower or a flying fish. Then his reason came back.

Now only the morning star was left, and it was shrinking rapidly to a tinier point and more nearly losing itself in the luminous clear sky. It was full daylight, only still shadowless and cool and waiting. Poieëssa lay golden-brown with rocks and thistles, and ready for

the sun. The whole upper air was full of it. At last it touched the cliff top. Timas ran out into the shallows to see it rise at the corner of the bay. Then for a little the golden thistles glowed and vibrated with more and more colour; the grey sands and pebbles of the beach were all rosy; the ripples were pierced with light. Timas tightened the bandage on his leg and walked along the edge through the water, and then up among the rocks. In a little hollow of great boulders, still cold and untouched by the sun, he found Nikaro sitting on the sand, doing nothing. Suddenly he said: 'You mustn't mind so much! It wasn't real! Nikaro, listen, there can be no Gods like the Gods we are told about, quarrelling and drinking and stealing women. There can be no Hera cheated by Zeus with his hundred rapes! There is only one thing we may call God, the centre of the universe – for everything must have a centre – the mover and movements of the stars, the order we see in some things, that in time we may see in all. I can acknowledge this God, I would worship it but it does not desire worship. Look, Nikaro, let me show you the truth!'

Nikaro stared up at him: 'But where is man in this? Where is the desire of the human heart?'

'Why should the heart desire lies?' said Timas, kneeling in the sand beside her. 'Nikaro, you want the truth, I think!'

'I had the truth,' said Nikaro, 'I had one truth; Truth takes as many forms as your movement and good can have. I had peace.' And then she turned and caught Timas by the wrist with both her hands: 'And

now Hera is broken and I have murdered a man and I shall be put in prison and tried – and –'

'Are you afraid of death, Nikaro?' said Timas softly, speaking close to her, in the dewy breath of her still sea-damp hair.

'No,' she said, 'I don't think so. There have been many priestesses before me. But I am afraid of things ending!'

He got his arm free and put it round her, very gently: 'I think they're bound to send to Delphi,' he said, 'before there is any decision about you, Nikaro. You mustn't be afraid, yet!'

'But Hera?' she said.

He said nothing for a moment, then: 'They'll make a new Hera, a big marble one, and paint her blue-eyed and golden-haired. And spend five years' taxes on her!'

'And my Hera who has been sacred all these years?'

Again he said nothing for a time, but rubbed his cheek against her head: 'I don't want to hurt you, Nikaro, but those years are over. The new Hera will not be sacred; she will not have the power of kindness or cruelty. She will only perhaps be beautiful.'

Nikaro turned in the crook of his arm, still holding his other hand with hers. 'They will come from the town to this beach,' she said, 'in another hour most likely. Timagoras, son of Alxenor, you should go.'

Timas lifted his hand, with her two still clinging to it like doves, and laid it on her neck. 'I came, as I think you know, to watch your rite and end the fear that I had of your Hera. Nikaro, my dearest, I didn't see much! Scarcely the Goddess at all, only you and your

maidens free and happy in the star-light. Nikaro, there is an hour, I think. Perhaps more. If I can make it easier for you let me stay.'

'You never meant it,' said Nikaro, and dropped her cheek to his hand.

Timas laughed and said: 'No, and I never meant to love the priestess of Hera! But we will stay together and when they come we will go out and meet them.'

'Good,' said Nikaro. The sun was down into their hollow now; it dried her hair and dress. They sat in the light on a warm rock, blinking into each other's eyes.

Suddenly Timas jumped up: 'What are we doing!' he cried. 'Nikaro, I must get you away!'

She caught his hand: 'No use!' she said, 'we knew before that it was no use.'

'But this is a beginning, not an ending,' he said, and sprang away from her and scrambled up the rock, looking first to land and then to sea. As he stood there the nose of a ship came past the corner of the bay, from north-east where the dawn had been, where the sea and air were still dazzling with a white brilliance. He watched her for a moment. She was a big ship, a merchant, close in, with sails set, but no wind to fill them. There were oars out, six great sweeps at each side; he could see the men walking up and down in the waist of the ship, shoving at them; but even so she was going very slowly. Nikaro, looking up, saw him fill with violent excitement before he spoke. Then: 'I can do it!' he said. 'Nikaro, you stand here – no, on that bigger one – and wave and shout, and I'll swim out to her!'

Before she could answer he was gone, running hard along the beach to head her, then deep in and out across the bay, with tremendous side strokes, arms and shoulders clean out of the water, shoving him through. She shouted with all her might, and waved her arms, and at last the people on the ship saw and came scurrying to the bows, to look first at her, then at the swimmer.

She ran down too, calling to Timas, and splashed out and began swimming herself. From the middle of the bay Timas was shouting to the merchant ship; they had stopped rowing. Half-way he swam back to join her. 'She's going to wait for us!' he said, shaking the salt out of his eyes and hair, 'we'll do it, Nikaro!'

'Have you money?' said Nikaro, gasping, and held on to his shoulder.

'A little,' he said, 'and she's bound for Athens. I'll write back, and father's sure to send me plenty. Hold tight, Nikaro, and float: I can swim for two!'

'She'll put in at Poieëssa first,' said Nikaro.

'All the better. We'll hide you and I'll go on shore and get the money myself. No one's going to suspect a ship from Asia! Don't be afraid, I'll bribe them all to keep you hidden.'

'But are you sure you want this?' Nikaro said, trying to lift her chin out of the jumping waves his arms made.

He looked back over his shoulder, wet and laughing. 'I've a lot to teach you, Nikaro,' he said.

They were almost up to the ship now. 'I can spin and weave and embroider,' she said, 'and I know how to deal with money –'

But the sailors were all shouting at them and dang-

ling ropes overboard. They hauled her up and then him; a hailstorm of questions burst over their dripping heads. Then the rowers took to the sweeps again. When they got breath and looked inland once more the little bay was beginning to close up, to fold itself into the golden barren cliffs, to become one shadow out of a dozen that blotched the long coast-line of Poieëssa.

A SOPHIST IN LOVE

Truth is the hardest thing to be sure of,
The hardest bird to catch.
I have met my match
In this new sport of truth luring!

Through my own tangled thoughts I chase it
Like one halt and half blind;
But in your locked mind
I grope for keys while it through tough steel goes racing!

In paths it must surely come by
I try to set my snare.
Yet truth, more aware,
Escapes by side roads somehow.

But ah, why so seek ill fortune
For truth in thoughts to look
– Maybe nests forsook?
Oh sun, oh bright sea, oh brown hills, have I caught, have I caught you?

BLACK SPARTA

That steep road went on and up, narrow and stony, going back to Sparta, Sparta again worse than ever it was, that freedom they'd promised him gone down the wind – oh, a Spartan promise! He was tied to the end of an ox-cart with a raw rope hide that had dried and tightened in the sun till his wrists were bleeding and his hands swollen; he ached all the time under a load of grain sacks. Far away, behind him now, was Megalopolis, the new city, the city with the fine name where bond were free at last, the city of the folk that hated Sparta; he would never get there. It was his own fault ever to have trusted a Spartan promise, fought for her, suffered for her. If he fell down the oxen wouldn't stop and the rope would drag him over the stones after them; he must keep up. If only there was water anywhere. If only the rope would stay slack, not tighten suddenly on his sore, burning wrists when the cart jerked. Now one of the sacks had shifted and was rubbing the skin off his shoulder.

The road got steeper and stonier still. Up in front, the Spartans with spears shouldered were singing as they went. Four were ordered back to hurry the baggage carts. They wanted to be over the pass, back again in their own hollow valley of Sparta by nightfall.

Already they thought how sweet their fair-haired wives would be after so long away. The ox-teams were goaded on, the helot baggage carriers shouted at till they hurried; the four Spartans went forward along the ranks to their places again, and he cowered, expecting to be hit. One of them checked himself and walked slower; he kept pace with the slave at the cart tail. 'Tragon,' he said, then repeated it, louder.

The man took his eyes off the ground and looked round and said 'Phylleidas,' then, hardly raising his voice above the creaking of the cart wheel, 'get me away.' The Spartan, still keeping pace, drew his sword and cut the rope between hands and cart; the loose end trailed over the stones and Tragon almost lost his balance for a moment. Then, still saying nothing, he cut through the knots at the wrists: the hide was so stuck into the cuts it had made that it did not fall away when he pulled. When that was done they went on walking side by side behind the cart, but the helot had a hand free to shift the sacks. Even now he was the first to speak: 'They got you safe back?'

Phylleidas took a deep breath, glad to have no more than that to answer. 'I'd lost so much blood I couldn't speak for ten days. Chilon was killed. But I'm not even lame now; a year is a long time.'

He was questioning Tragon all the time with his eyes, but the man would say nothing till the question was put to him straight. Then he burst out: 'Why am I here now? It's you who should answer that! It's your State that promised me freedom if I served her well as a soldier! Didn't I? Didn't I?'

'You were taken prisoner.'

'So would you have been if they hadn't got you back in time! I was wounded, I was wounded twice more after you had gone. You'd see the scars now if I was clean. I couldn't even stand.'

'And then?'

'They asked for a ransom. Not very much, but I hadn't the money and no one offered it!' He turned his head and looked straight at the Spartan; his face was cut and bruised and dirty; only the eyes, thought Phylleidas, were the same, and, under that stare, he had to face again that most disturbing memory, which he had hoped was quite smothered; the message coming about the ransom for a helot soldier. They had the name wrong; but he had never tried to find out if there was a mistake. Only he was too ill then, and too unhappy – not himself – and he was not rich. He tried to face out the stare from Tragon, but felt he was blushing – oh, it was not the part of a good citizen to go filling Sparta with these freed slaves! Tragon went on: 'No, the ransom never came. So when I was better I was sold in Corinth. It's not too bad being a slave there. Most of the others were barbarians; my master had no great wish to keep a slave who was a Hellene – even my sort. He hadn't been bred up to kill them from behind in the dark like you, Phylleidas!' He looked round again, half expecting a blow, but when it did not come he went on again: 'He offered to sell me my freedom and gave me a chance of earning the money; then I was going to Megalopolis.'

'Why?'

'You don't think I loved Sparta then, do you? But it didn't happen. I'll tell you why. My master was a friend of your proxenos; I was sent there one day with a letter. There were two – of them' – he nodded forward towards the singing of the Spartan soldiers – 'in the courtyard. They asked me who I was. Like a fool I told. Because: well, seeing them made me suddenly think I wanted to be with you all again. If they put it right – it would have been so easy for them and I thought somehow they were going to – I'd be back where I was, where I should be, and Megalopolis nothing! Oh, I was ready to believe in you again, I was, Phylleidas –'

'Don't talk so much!' said Phylleidas, trying not to speak as angrily as he felt with all those hot, loose words jumping like pebbles against his shining mind. 'What happened?'

'This!' said Tragon, holding out his wrists where the creeping blood drops had begun to settle and thicken. 'This! I was back in the trap. Whether they believed me or not, they laughed at me. And they bought me from my master and the painted temples and kind girls of Corinth, they bought me, laughing, and even then I thought – I thought they might have remembered back a year! I thought so till we got clear of the city; I was going to be grateful to them – by the Twins I was! But – but – And then, when I tried to speak, tried to tell them how I'd fought, and about you – oh, don't be angry with me, Phylleidas, they didn't believe me! – and when I tried to say the Amyclæ God was my God too, then it all came down on me again, pain and darkness, black Sparta like my fathers told me it was!'

Phylleidas frowned, trying to sift the core of plain fact out of the voice that shifted him about between past and present like a bird in the wind – like that hawk quartering, slipping suddenly across the sky, over the shadows in the dusky pass ahead, between them and Sparta. . . . Hastily he drew back his eyes from too far, too vague lookings, steadied his mind: 'And now?'

For once Tragon spoke shortly: 'Now it's for you, Phylleidas.'

But what, what? The rest of to-day had been water-clear before: over the pass, home, the wagons for him and Idaios to get stacked while the others cooked supper, and then, before supper was quite over, to slip away barefoot, the cool, rough turf pressing up against his skin with that amazing, tingling texture of wild things, and down and over the wall, the stones that would have lost their heat at nightfall, the ditch to jump, the thin boughs of the nut tree just swaying in the moonlight, the dizzy brushing by herb borders in the garden, and then to call three times close to the shutters and know that in the dark inside one girl would hear and wake and be struck through all her sweet body by the same hard and lovely heart beats as his own! Now this other thing was rippling the clearness, breaking the image, this voice he knew better than hers.

'Tell me how you are getting me out of the trap, Phylleidas!'

'Wait,' he said, 'wait,' and walked on, keeping pace with this intolerable stumbling of slaves and oxen.

From half under the sacks the voice went on: 'When

you said Chilon was killed I couldn't believe you at once. That beauty broken clean. I knew how he loved you, Phylleidas, how the flame in him caught you up, burning, flaring. I remember him coming to you the day before, when we knew it was to be a hard fight, in clear day with his hands full of flowers.'

'Oak leaves,' said Phylleidas. It hurt him, it tore him, and yet he wanted Tragon to go on. None of the others would talk about Chilon, not really – only like someone in a song of old wars – when a year ago Chilon had been so much alive! 'Oak leaves and quince flowers, wild quince – oh God!'

'And he said you should both wear them in sunlight: in sunlight you had been lovers: in the hills: in full air. And he took off his breastplate because there would be no attack yet, and he had on his old shirt. He took that off and put on the new one, the red one with short sleeves, while you made the wreath, looking at him all the time, knocking off the quince petals because your hand shook. And I said I would mend the old shirt that evening, and he laughed and said better not: let luck in at the holes. So I didn't. And he asked me to drink with you both.'

'Yes,' said Phylleidas, 'and I never saw him, Tragon, not after he was dead. They got me away. I didn't know till afterwards. I saw him fighting and shouting and happy. I never saw him dead.' They were still walking up, but the hills and the shadows had heightened faster still at each side, and all round them; soon there would be a star; soon the pass would dip towards Sparta. He thought quickly, then spoke again:

'Stay walking as you are for a little, Tragon; I shall get you out very soon!' And he leapt forward, running up to the others, his spear in his hand low and balanced.

But when he came to them and they looked round at him, Idaios and the rest, there was something surprising in their faces that stopped him saying what he meant to say. And yet, when they smiled at him and he smiled back at them, not speaking, what had he thought he would see? They were the same as they had always been. And suddenly it came into his mind with a faint horror, that perhaps he himself was not the same any longer. So he must speak, must try it on them and know if there was the least difference! 'Those helots who fought for us last year,' he said, 'did you know any of them?'

Idaios spat a dark, star-shaped mess into the grey glistening dust of the road: 'Know them!'

'But they were brave enough!' said Phylleidas. 'I'm sure of that: quick, brave soldiers.'

'If we were there to see!' said Idaios. 'And it's that sort we get walking about now, freed: as if it was their country!' He swung his arm out, low against the hillside as if he could sweep it all in and hold it against his breast and mouth. And he had been in the same battles, in another brigade, but still – mightn't he know as much? – as much and more, be less blinded by something, whatever it was, friendship – oh no, not friendship, not with a helot! 'Six feet of earth,' said Idaios, 'I would give them that!' And the others laughed and nodded, and the single first stars nodded in the evening over their spear heads.

Phylleidas dropped behind again, letting the oxen and the loaded carts go by him, the slinking, cowering drivers shoving at the wheels as they caught in ruts, or suddenly holding back as the downward slope at the far side began and the yoke-blocks butted forward and bumped against the swinging horns. Sharply he wished he could have the courage not to see Tragon, not to speak to him, to let the past bury its dead, bury him as Chilon had been buried, till just now, under a blue, far-off mountain of memory. And even at this minute, couldn't he get out of it, get back to the others again and not be different? No good: he had cut the rope. Now, he and Tragon were walking level. 'You know the Green Cave?' he said. 'Can you get there in the dark?'

'I can follow the water up.'

'Good. I'll give those two behind something else to look at: then you can go.'

'But what then, Phylleidas? How long shall I stay there? I've no food, no weapons! I shall be missed – they'll follow me – they'll get me again!'

It came thundering into his head to say: 'Look out for yourself, that's all I shall do!' and then go back to his own real friends and let the world go on. But where would Tragon go? To Megalopolis, to be an enemy. Unless he died first. If one starts a thing one has to finish it. He said, 'You'll have to get right away. A hundred miles from Sparta. In case anything happens. You should keep up near the cliffs and go south, and so to the sea. If I get you new clothes no one will know you. But you must take the first ship you can. I'll bring you money and food and a sword.'

'When?'

'To-morrow night late, about the time the Swan dips. Here's my ration to take with you for now. Drop the sacks in a bush.' As Tragon caught hold of the bread their fingers touched and Phylleidas shivered as if somehow this had sealed him to something. His head flung back with nostrils stretched and eyes wide against the night. But surely he had done nothing against his honour? Not yet, he thought, but most certainly against something else, something even more a part of him than his honour. But he could not tell, it was no use watching his own mind like this! 'Is that clear?' he said.

'Yes,' said Tragon, 'and oh – Phylleidas, when I thought Sparta so black, I'd forgotten you!'

But Phylleidas hadn't waited for that; the moment he felt the voice rise to emotion he had jumped back and was suddenly letting himself go, clearing out the anger and irritation in a splendid bursting river of curses, the sort of thing he only did once or twice in a year. And the two drivers, as surprised as they were terrified, never noticed one shadow the less or heard the bushes rustling at the side of the road.

And then Phylleidas went back to the others. They were singing and he joined in, drowning himself for a time in the music that accented the beat of their half-tired, half-eager feet on the downward road. And if that could have gone on for ever with the night getting no later and home no nearer and yet no further, he would have kept his peace of heart, stayed still a part of something, Sparta, black Sparta, velvet black in the great hollows cupped and spread below them, Sparta

that would be green again in the day-time, the greenest place in Hellas, green and sunny as it was in the days when he and Chilon had both been alive and loving one another so that the sunshine followed them about and golden, golden grew the air in the shadows under the oak leaves.

They halted and set the slaves to gathering wood and lighting fires from the little braziers they carried. The wagons were lined up for him and Idaios to count and see to. He began slowly, wondering what to say when Idaios found out – it was his end – about the missing helot. His peace was quite gone again. He kept on thinking about what he had done. But it was not only that; it was remembering the shifting voice, the too many, too piercing words, the way the man moved suddenly, all over, with his untaught body and mind that did not know clearness and beauty and discipline. He felt jarred on as if he had been made to listen to a harp played out of tune. Idaios shouted for him: 'There's a slave got away! One of these swine cut the rope!' He had the two drivers from behind by the neck, his broad, fierce hands bearing down on them, gripping at the base of their skulls ready for a kill, shoving them over at last into two heaps at Phylleidas's feet for him to kick as hard as he could. By the time he and Idaios had finished beating the helots he had almost stopped being so unhappy. But, of course, there was nothing to be got out of them. 'Didn't *you* see when you went by last time?' asked Idaios. But 'No,' he said sharply, aware of the number of lies that would have to be told sooner or later. Some of them came at once,

round the camp fire when the others questioned him about what had happened, very angry that it should happen to be just their Mess that the loss would fall on! The glow of their fire had been a signal for one or two other Spartiates who had been up hunting near the pass to come over and join them, with a delicious wild sucking-pig for the pot. They offered their hounds for tracking the runaway, but it was impossible to say just where his trail could be picked up from among all the others, so that was no use.

They ate the sucking-pig with the good little balls of oatmeal and herbs that their Mess cook knew by this time always to make for them when there was half an hour to spare. The moon rose over the hills, big and pale golden, and sailed up, seeming to get littler and littler and brighter silver, putting out the stars round it, but not the warm, gay fire of pine boughs. One of the new-comers was playing a reed whistle at the far side, sharp leaping tunes of the midsummer dances that twirled up with the smoke and out on to the spreading air. Below in the valley was the lovely tangled din of nightingales singing against one another, and now and then an owl. Sometimes the tethered oxen rattled the carts, but there was little sound from any of the helots, only once or twice a laugh or an angry voice hastily shut down again, or from time to time, a deep moaning breath or a fit of sobbing from one of the beaten drivers. Phylleidas had been gnawing gently at a soft marrowy rib bone, spitting out the sharp bits and exploring the hollows with his tongue. Now he put it down and backed out of the circle, was gone before any

of them saw. Idaios laughed and told the new-comers that his friend was just married. Before the night had gone on much longer two of the others were away as well; the Mess was just at the right age for marrying then.

Tragon was still following up the stream-bed, now, in late Spring, nearly dry and full of loose ankle-bruising stones, to the Green Cave. For a time he had just been terrified, sure he would be followed, caught again, hurt, so that he could only think of going very quickly and silently. Where there was any light he would run, tripping over branches, knocking against things that made terribly loud noises, then hiding under jutting rocks, hardly able to listen for the pounding of his heart like feet chasing him. And again he would come into heavy shadows and must feel his way under oak boughs. But by moon-rise everything was still and he knew he must be near the cave that he and Phylleidas had played in as boys; and at last he began to realize that he was free, that this wasn't a dream, that perhaps he would never be tied to a cart tail, never be whipped and laughed at any more. He could think it out clearly and wonderfully for a moment or two, but then he would get lost and not know what was real. All this year, ever since the unanswered message to Phylleidas, everything had been wrong. He had been horribly sure that no Spartan friendship or promise was worth anything; and not only that. He saw them as evil, a black rotting on the face of life. He had believed them once to his ruin; if ever he was free to fight again it would be on the other side! And now the impossible thing had hap-

pened and he had got free. And he was believing it all over again! Now the sideways crack in the rock that was the beginning of the cave shone with a dripping of wet moss; he squeezed through carefully so that it should look undisturbed, felt his way across the cold pool and over to the stone ledge at the back. He had not been there since he was grown-up. But it was dry and broad enough to lie along; he ate half the bread, then fell suddenly asleep with a piece still half chewed in his mouth.

Further down from the pass the night was warmer and stiller. In the moonlight Phylleidas could see every crack in the flat face of the house, the deep shadow under the tiles where the swallows were all asleep in their nests, even the green paint lions ramping on the shutters. He had given his third call and now stood back, pressing into a bush of mallow, in case her mother or nurse were to wake and look out with Theano.

The thin petals and pointed buds of the mallow patted against his cheek, shaken by the quickening of his breathing. The shutter on the left creaked and a hand came round the edge, shoving it open. Theano knelt upright on the sill for a full minute, peering out, with a long and lovely smile. Her hair was short still from the cutting at marriage; the clipped ends frilled out level with her shoulders; she smoothed it back out of her eyes, passing her hands across it till it lay sleek over her head, and then pressed down a band of soft leather over it, one he knew, with plaited ends that were nice to bite. She wore a girl's dress of white stuff, with a deep, close-fitting sash, so short that when she knelt

up in it like this it was clear of her knees. She could not see Phylleidas, only knew he was there, and suddenly unpinned her dress on the right shoulder so that it fell clear of her breast. Then quickly, before he could look enough, leant over on one hand and vaulted clear of the flowers on to the turf, and turned and pushed back the shutters. From behind she was like a boy; he could guess at the movements of her shoulder and leg muscles with her arms up and knees stiff getting the wood into place.

As she faced him he came out of the shadows and their arms opened to one another, and they were trembling and hid their faces in the hollows of the other's shoulder, and pressed against each other till the trembling quieted into the warmth and tension, the pain waiting to turn into pleasure that both their bodies knew so well, that their minds answered to with murmuring and faint delicious laughter and sharpening of all their senses, so that the dew brushing against their bare arms was brilliant and exciting as their own kisses. They stood away then, only just touching fingers, looking into one another's eyes, staring freely and fearlessly because they were lawful lovers, man and wife, equal sharers in the same delight. He leant over quickly and kissed the tip of her bare breast, and she threw her head back and laughed and jumped with both feet like a child, and then tugged his hand so that they both started running.

They ran together, through two fields and an orchard, sometimes hand-in-hand, sometimes loose with Phylleidas racing round her, or she round him, bound-

ing into the cool air that yet did not make them less warm, jumping over shadows, at stars, across each other's tracks! By and by they came to a cornfield, pale under the high moon, and still running they snatched at the soft, milky corn ears and bit at them. At the top of the field a bank sloped up with tangly trees growing on it, thorn and pomegranate and spiky evergreens. Theano looked round at him, with the sweet laughter hovering about her lips, and Phylleidas knew she was ready to play at hunter and hunted, and leapt out after her suddenly and very quickly.

Already the moon was lower in the sky when they looked about them again, lying loose on the turf, half sleepy and half full of awareness, so that everything took on some very special life of its own, a twig with three leaves on it, nodding to itself in a stray current of air, the bright haze round the moon, Theano's little finger-nail held up at eye-level. Suddenly Phylleidas turned half over as well as he could with her head still snuggling down on to his arm. 'I want to tell you something,' he said.

'Tell,' said Theano sleepily, with one ear close over the solid and lovely throbbing of the blood in the bend of his elbow.

'To-day,' he said, 'I found a helot who had fought beside me and Chilon last year; he was filthy with sores and dirt on his back and head; he was tied to a cart tail. I cut the rope and helped him to get away.'

Theano sat up straight in one movement: 'You didn't!'

'I sent him to the Green Cave. To-morrow night I

shall take him food and money and my other sword. I've known him since we were boys.'

'Known him!' said Theano, reminding him for the moment of Idaios. 'What do you mean?'

'Well, he was on father's farm. I suppose – no, we weren't friends, of course; but he was brave and good-hearted. And Chilon liked him.'

'But this – Phylleidas, it's no business of yours, surely! You'll get yourself into trouble over it, my dear.' She frowned, her face close up to his.

He took her hand, he wanted her close, he felt very little and helpless and knew she was right about the trouble he would be in, and suddenly he saw his State as a vast, menacing black thing that he could never even try to appeal to if his rights were not its. 'I couldn't not,' he said.

And she: 'But if the State had not freed him there must have been some reason against it that you don't know.'

'I ought to have paid his ransom. The Ephors don't free them unless it's very clear.'

Theano shook herself. 'They're right! It's not those dogs we want for our lovers, not their children we want to bear!'

She rubbed her rumpled fair head against Phylleidas, but he looked out over it, troubled, not sure if he could tell her properly. 'But he ought to have been freed. He fought for us. He talked about Chilon just now. He oughtn't to be dragged back and whipped and kicked! He hates us. When he gets out he may still hate us. He may go to Megalopolis.'

'And you're helping him! Oh, my dear love, don't.'

'But I must. I mustn't think of what's to come. Only of now and – and justice.'

'Justice isn't in one time only.'

'Mine's for now, and last year.'

'Justice isn't ours! It can't be any one man's – it s not justice any longer then.'

'Where is it, Theano?'

'With the State. Surely. We can't know, we can't see the whole. If we take it into our own hands – oh my dear, it puts the whole thing wrong! And that's more than any life or judgment of ours.'

Phylleidas picked up her hand that was lying on his knee and began straightening the fingers, one after the other. 'But this – why wasn't I right, Theano?'

'How can I tell? I'm only a little bit of the whole thing, too. If I had to say, perhaps it would be that there are so few of us and so many of them; we can't afford to go the least out of our way. But you're not happy about what you've done, are you?'

'No,' he said, and suddenly she caught hold of him and began kissing him deeply and fiercely, because she could not bear her own husband to be unhappy.

After a time he looked up, happier. 'Dear, I must go,' he said, 'back to the others. Don't mind what I've been saying.'

She nodded, her mouth shut against any words that might keep him with her still. This going back to camp was all part of it, the wholeness that she had tried to make clear to herself and him. It would have happened in no other state in Hellas. But yet it worked out

in the arithmetic of love; her mother said so, and the older women. And she knew at least that it kept her brave. They ran together again, till she was in sight of the house, and kissed quickly and ran once more, but each their own way. He did not think much more about Tragon; when he got back to camp he threw himself down and slept solidly till morning when Idaios woke him at last, after letting him sleep long after the others.

But Theano did not sleep for a long time. She was turning his story over and over and that last 'no' admitting his unhappiness. Unhappiness surely, and what else? Perhaps guilt. The more she looked at it, the more it seemed to her that he had done wrong in some subtle way which neither of them knew but which troubled them both, not a clear human wrong you could either leave or put right, but like some ill word in a temple, something cast against a holiness that she could only dimly know. Towards dawn she slept on her uneasiness and dreamt of her lover running down a long, blazing hot road, looking back over his shoulder, with something chasing him, while she called to him to come over to her, in the green grass, but it seemed as if he could not hear. And the thing after him, whatever its final dreadfulness would be, was coming nearer and nearer. She woke with the taste of that in her mouth and the fear of that in the back of her head. She made up her mind what was the good thing to do. She wrapped a veil of heavy grey stuff, woven at home, that she wore now with a queer pride to show that she was a grown woman, married, over her head and round her

shoulders, and went out and down to Sparta, and stood in the market-place, waiting for the Ephors to go by on their way to the Council.

One or two friends spoke to her, an uncle whom she liked, her old nurse, and her youngest brother running past, very important, with a message from his Iren. She leant on her long ash stick, not moving even when the sun shifted round full on to her. And they saw by her quietness that she had business of her own, and did not question her. It was nearly midday before the Ephors came into the market-place of Sparta. She waited until they had been to the Temple and made their vows for the safety and good counsel of the State. Then she moved out, so that she stood in their path and could see their faces. She let the first two go by, but caught the third one by the edge of his cloak and knelt. He took her hand in his. 'Your asking?' he said. Now it was not so easy to speak; she felt choking and blind and very young; she began once and then stopped. He waited; there was a space clear about them where men and women turned out of their way to leave room for shy Truth to come to the speaker. At last she said, 'I have to tell you of a helot escaped from bonds the State laid on him and likely to be a danger. He is in the Green Cave, and will be till late to-night. Send the Krypteia.'

'Who told you?' the Ephor said, bending nearer.

She shook her head.

'Follow me,' he said, and kept hold of her hand.

She went in to the Council House between him and another; as the door shut behind them she turned her

head quickly and was dreadfully afraid: this was the thing in her dream. She had never been inside before: it was quite a little room, and, after all, just seven men sitting round on chairs, some quite old and some not, with combed beards and bright still eyes. Two of them she had seen in her father's house as guests of honour. She had led the singing of the hymn to the luck of the house when they were listening – or not listening: why should she be frightened? There was also, she saw, one rather young man, standing, with his hand and cloak up over the lower part of his face, so that she could not see who he was. 'Where is this man?' asked the Ephor she had spoken to in the market. 'Say clearly.'

'In the hills to the right of the Western Pass. The road turns – like this – and there is a big pointed rock, covered with vines.'

Suddenly she realized, from the way he was following her words, who the standing man was, and began speaking directly to him: 'You know it? Follow up the river-bed till just before it clears the trees. There are low cliffs with ferns in the cracks that close in on both sides. Go between them. A few paces on, to the right again, there is a sloping split in the rocks with a little spring trickling out of it. He is there. Go before night.'

She turned from him – the head of the Krypteia – out of breath as if she had been running, back to the Ephors. 'I have said.'

'When did you see this cave?'

'Just after I was married, we – I – I saw it.'

The Ephor stuck out his beard at her suddenly. 'How do you know about the helot, my girl?'

All at once the whole seven had their eyes on her! 'Artemis help me,' she said, 'it is true!' The Ephor got up and began coming towards her quite slowly; he lifted his hands for a grip and she was nearly screaming. He pounced on her wrist and she gasped, stiffening and steadying. 'He will get away in the night!' she said. 'Send to-day!'

'Who is helping him?' said the Ephor.

She looked up at his face, then down at his hands, tightening, tightening over hers. 'No one.'

Suddenly she was let loose again and another Ephor spoke from behind her: 'You are Theano, daughter of Euboidas, married to Phylleidas, whose farm is up the road to the Western Pass.' She said nothing at all; this seemed to be a statement, not a question. Besides, she was badly frightened, and not for herself alone now. But if one is part of a whole one can have no secrets. 'I see,' said the same man, and as he spoke she saw the door opening again.

She did what she could; she turned to the Ephor who had spoken and said slowly: 'I don't think you *do* see.' And then sprang for the open door, half expecting it to catch her before she was through. But they let her go. She had dropped her ash stick; it didn't matter. She screwed her hands tight into the grey veil and ran through the market and up the road for home.

In the morning the question of the missing slave had come up again. Phylleidas had tried to make as little as possible of it, and so had Idaios, backing him. But the rest decided they must report it, and sent Phylleidas to do that. Two of the others were to follow with the oxen

and carts and everything else, checked and counted. Those who were left would have a good day of it, bathing in the pools of the lazy Eurotas, warming and shrinking already at the first touch of summer, or they would be seeing their fathers and mothers and friends, and paying the vows they made before they went. The married ones perhaps could steal another word or two with their wives, and one whose father was dead had to go and get leave to set up house on his own. The Mess cook came in too, to buy salt and a new iron cooking pot. There was tanned leather wanted, besides, for shoe soling. One of the helot drivers was limping badly that morning from a kick on the kneecap.

Phylleidas went off down the road at a quick walk, sometimes half a run. If only he could have bought Tragon and then freed him himself! He had been in other States and knew the practice. But Sparta was different. One did not own things that way. The helots belonged to all the citizens, no one of them to any single master; the only way to free Tragon was through all these citizens in council. And that was no good. So Phylleidas must go outside the law. All the way towards the city he was looking very carefully at the faces of everyone he met – every Spartiate. Had this one or that ever gone outside the law? Had he become different from the others? Surely not. And how lovely, how beautiful to stay always the same without doubt or conflict, with everything resolved and happy and open! When he got to the city he would have to find some gold or silver money; not much. He thought his mother would have some, the remains of old hoardings.

And there was a cousin who had travelled. The clothes would be easy enough, and the food; though he would feel rather a fool buying them. If only there was someone he could talk to about it! But it had to be a secret now and in the future. Well, it was good discipline for the mind to have secrets which must be kept.

And then suddenly he saw someone he could speak to. She was going slowly along the side of the road, with her head bent under the grey shawl. He had not even recognized her till she was quite near, and she was not looking his way at all, but fixedly on the ground, unlike herself. He touched her on the shoulder and said, 'My wife!'

She stopped and lifted her head and drew in her breath on a tearing cry. 'You!' she said. 'Oh – what are you doing? Where are you going?'

'I have to get the things I told you of: food, clothes and money. You know why. Can you help me about the money, Theano?'

She let him go and stood back a pace. Between them the dry mud on the edge of the cart rut flaked and powdered. He heard a corn-crake in the field behind him. She said: 'I have helped you.'

And he said: 'What have you done?'

And she said: 'I have done my duty, and yours.'

He looked past her down the Sparta road. 'You told them?'

'The Ephors. Yes.'

'How much?'

'Where he is hidden. Only that. Not about you. Oh, my dear, you said you were unhappy!'

'What are they doing?'

'Sending: before night.'

'And it's midday now. Sending, sending. You said –'

'The Krypteia.'

He faced towards her again. She meant to tell him how dreadful it had been, show him the bruises where the bones of the old man's fingers had stuck into her hand and arm. But he was looking like a stranger. He said, very low, 'I must hurry.' And he lifted his hand and hit her on the side of the head and sent her staggering across the road. Then he went on.

She lay on the stones at the road edge with her arms wrapped round her head. While he was in hearing she must not scream, must not even cry out loud. She choked on dry grass and dust. She was too surprised to have any feeling at all about him, love or hate or fear, not for a long time. Slowly she sat up, lifting her aching, dazed head, and looked along the road. After some minutes she found she was looking the wrong way; it cost her infinite pains to turn. He was out of sight. She crawled under the shadow of an olive and fell through deep and painful gulfs of dizzying, cracking darkness. When she sat up again, and at last stood, she could tell by the sun it was much later in the day.

Actually, Phylleidas had never been on Krypteia himself; but his friends had. Chilon had done it three years before. It was a normal happening, exciting and interesting in its way, and part of a good citizenship, one of the things one did when one was told. But to-day it did not seem like that. Because of Tragon. This same Tragon who talked so maddeningly, who

was not by any right standards the sort of man that men should be. Up to now he had not been quite sure how the State would judge it; he had hoped that perhaps the State might in some obscure way be brought to give him, if not approval, at least consent. But now the judgment had been made. The Krypteia would be there before nightfall. Yes. So he must go against everything now, with even fuller knowledge of what he was doing. She made him. She forced him to be different. He had done with her, done with everything beautiful and peaceful. Because he had chosen to go his own way.

He bought the clothes and the food, quickly, then went to his mother's house and found, as he thought, that she still had some Persian money, kept for the mere magpie pleasure of it, not for use. She gave it to him, though, and his old sword that he had lent to his next brother. The brother was away, but the sword was in his room. He took it without arguing. That was lucky. Before he had time to think any more he was on the road to the Pass again and the sun was dropping half-way towards evening.

Tragon sat on the ledge at the back of the cave, gripping the edge of it with his hands. His eyes were accustomed to the dim green light, so that he could scarcely believe he was not visible from outside. The sloping crack between the stones was blinking bright, the little ferns and mosses were edged and dripping with sunlight. The day had been going on now – how long? The strain of it was beginning to spread down from his eyes and mind into his finger-tips. And then there would be most of the night. He wished he could

have slept again, got strong for his day and night – he thought he must reckon it as that – of getting to the coast, when he would need all his courage and endurance in the hills, all his wits when he got down to the plain. But sleep was nowhere near. He was hungry too, but that he was used to. Half a day more perhaps: the slow dimming of the crack, just as it had slowly lightened that morning. The cave would be quite black again till moonrise; so much the better. When it was all thick dark he could think he was not there at all. But a day and most of a night for Phylleidas to change his mind, for a Spartan promise to be broken! No, no, he thought to himself, it couldn't be another trap! Why should it be? But Phylleidas might so easily come to think differently by now, and then – what would it matter what he had said to a helot! For a time Tragon simply sat there raging over this unalterable slavery that was fixed into him, blood and bone, so that, however much he tried to be like the others, tried to make their virtues his – as he had during the fighting – it was yet no use, and a promise to him *was* different. He knew he was a man too, he knew that he could even understand some things and do some things better and quicker than they; he knew he could have bought his freedom in Corinth, or any other Hellene state, perhaps even by luck, skill and bravery grown worthy of citizenship, at least been respected and safe, able to talk as an equal with the rest! But that was a knowledge got with the outside of himself, through his intelligence. Deep below he felt his slavery, here in Sparta. And where else mattered? It was his own Sparta. To-night,

if all went well, he would set about leaving it for ever. Suddenly he realized that if he had gone to Megalopolis, as he wanted, it was simply to be fighting Sparta, to be in this way if in no other violently aware of Sparta still. He got up and walked about the cave, touching the damp walls with the palms of his hands. Wherever he went he would still in his heart be a helot of Sparta.

Surely it was beginning to get a little less light! He went over to the crack, and then stayed tense, listening. That must be footsteps. A long way off still, but the echo carried them up between the cliffs. Was it some shepherd or swineherd – one of his own people? But there was no sound of beasts. Was it Phylleidas twelve hours before his time? Or was it – was it – for a dreadful moment the Pan-flutes too shrill to hear but not to feel were dinning round his head; his sight dimmed and cleared and dimmed again; his muscles twitched him about, uncontrolled. Then he got free and listened again. It was only one man coming, either a stranger or Phylleidas: not them. The ravine was all in shadow now, though there was sun in the tops of the pines on the far side. He lay on his face and peered through the fern curtain at the very bottom, warily, in case it was not Phylleidas. The steps got nearer and nearer; he fought to keep himself calm. They must be near the bend. Yes, it was Phylleidas – hurrying. He climbed to his feet, slowly, holding on to the juts of the cave wall; he was sweating all over.

Phylleidas shoved through into the cave, burning and gasping with the pace he had come up that difficult bed of stone; he threw the clothes down. 'Change,

quick!' he said and dropped to the ground and drank with his head and shoulders right in the pool. When he sat up, getting used to the dark, Tragon was in his new, clothes and buckling on the sword. 'Now eat,' he said 'and get the money stowed safe. You'll have to hurry.'

'Why?' said Tragon, biting into the bread and sausage.

Phylleidas waited till he had a mouthful down, then said, 'The Krypteia are after you.'

Tragon made a queer little moan and gave at the knees, collapsed on to the floor of the cave.

'They won't be here yet,' said Phylleidas, trying not to show either anger or disgust. 'And you'll be all right if you keep steady.'

And Tragon said: 'Did you change your mind, Phylleidas?'

'No,' said Phylleidas heavily.

'Then why?'

'They found out. What does it matter how! You've got to get up clear of the wood and cross the road higher than they'll come. Eat a little, you fool!'

Tragon ate obediently. 'They'll know I've crossed the road,' he said, 'when they find me gone. Will they have hounds?'

'I don't know!' said Phylleidas. 'And don't be so frightened, for God's sake. Remember the battles we've been in together, Tragon!'

Tragon said, 'I shall be alone,' and got up. He looked quite decent in the new clothes. Then: 'Has anyone ever escaped?'

'Dozens, I expect,' said Phylleidas, startled at this and beginning to see what the name of the Krypteia

meant to the hunted ones. 'If only you can keep your head! Can you?'

But Tragon said: 'If they get me I shan't say it was you who helped me!'

Phylleidas couldn't bear answering that in its own emotion; he said: 'They'll know my sword.' He turned Tragon round and saw that the purse was twisted safely through his belt, then said: 'Now go. You'll get a ship. Good luck, Tragon!' And he went over to the crack.

Tragon came over too, eating his last mouthful, and suddenly said: 'Do you hear anything?'

Phylleidas listened too. He said: 'They're before their time. Go!'

And Tragon shook and said, 'I shall never do it!'

'Yes, you will!' said Phylleidas; then: 'I'll stay and cover you.'

'Oh!' said Tragon, and suddenly kissed him and took a breath and turned and ran up the ravine.

When he was out of sight, Phylleidas sat down; he thought he had easily another minute or two. And he had to reckon up just where he was. He had never meant to say the last thing; he thought that when Tragon was off, he would be clear again, be able to take his own real place and not be different any more. Now he was going to do something very terrible and very open, so that he would never be able to get away from it; he dared not quite face that. They were taking a long time. He supposed some were going up-stream a little so as to get to the cave mouth from every side at once. But that was all right: however much they went

up-stream Tragon would be much further up, and anyhow they would not see him because they would not be looking for him there. He began to wonder whether it would be possible to argue with them, to show them quite plainly his and Tragon's Right, so that they would stop. But that was out of the question: even if he could explain everything, making clear what was so tangled in his own mind, they were under orders from the Ephors and could not do anything but carry out those orders. He would have himself, in the old days. Then how to delay them? Best perhaps to get right into the cave, so that they would think for a long time that he was Tragon. Perhaps they would shoot in at random, but he thought not, and anyhow he must chance it; they were more likely to try and smoke him out. He sat on the ledge and swung one foot over the other. It was a game, the sort of game the boys played.

There were quite a lot of noises outside now; it was beginning. He laughed to himself rather happily, with the play idea all through him. But then he heard the short, muffled, snapping bark of a hound. That certainly lessened Tragon's chance of escape. Unless he could do something; he thought hard. There was silence outside for long enough to make anyone strained with listening, then suddenly a horrid long yell that set his heart beating very fast; it made him think: If I was a helot that might have bolted me. Rather quickly the play feeling got swamped by the much less pleasant feeling of how it would be if – A big if, of course, but there it was. There were two of them at the edge of the crack now, whispering, then

listening. He could not help moving a little, making a slight noise. He heard one say: 'There he is!' They moved away and he could hear them dragging branches over the stones for the fire to smoke him out. He thought this was a bad game and going on much too long. The hound barked again, nastily. He drew his sword, quite clear that he would get out before there was a fire and before they expected him. Suddenly he wondered whether, if he was a helot, if it was really true, not all a game, he would not rather stay and be smothered by the smoke and not go out to face certain death in the ravine.

He tiptoed to the crack and looked out as well as he could. There were three of them up to the right pulling along a young oak tree with plenty of green leaves for smoke. One of them at least was a man he knew. The fourth stood lower down in the bed of the ravine on the other side, holding two hounds on a leash. He had never noticed before what terrible great beasts they were, with enormous depth of chest, leaning forward, towards him, from all four legs, tugging at their collars. He thought of them racing after Tragon – almost at once – and looked for a flat stone to jump on to. It was not a game after all, not with those brutes.

As he leapt for the stone, the bloodhounds of the Krypteia were loosed on him, both together. He could only deal with one of them. The other knocked him over and he and it rolled in the stones, its horrible baying right in his ears, its stinking breath in his face, its claws tearing his side as he kept it off him with both hands on its throat under the jaw-bone. Then sheer

weight told and it got a grip on his left arm and he yelled with pain and terror trying desperately to knock it off before it was through to the bone. It was pulled off him and he got half up, clinging to a rock, and saw swords all round. 'Who are you?' they said, but he did not answer at once. His arm was dreadfully torn and hurting so that he could hardly stand. One of them said: 'You're not the same man!' and another, 'You're Phylleidas!' As he stood upright and then moved a step or two among the lowered swords, the hound started baying again and straining towards him and the blood it could smell so thick. He got his sword out of the body of the first hound; the Krypteia stood all around him. He said: 'The man's escaped.'

'God, we can trail him!' said one of them.

But Phylleidas struck down into the neck of the hound with all the quickness and strength he had left. 'You won't!' he said. All four of the men were on to him at once, their hands on his arms and throat; he fought them instinctively, biting and kicking and throwing himself back to drag them over. Then they got him down and it was finished.

He did not go on struggling; he let one of them hold him while another bandaged his arm. The hound he had stabbed was still kicking a little, but for yards down the shrunk pools of the river were trickling fresh and red with the beast's blood; he would never bay like that after Tragon now. The eldest of the four men was standing in front of him, looking down at him with eyes all troubled by something he had never met before. 'Do you know what you have done?' he said.

'Yes,' Phylleidas said, 'I know. I have saved Tragon from you.'

'But' – the man knelt down on the stone beside him, as if closer sight could somehow bring him understanding – 'we are the Krypteia! And you've killed our hounds!'

'You loosed them on me. Get that bandage tighter. You might look at my side, too.'

'But we couldn't tell you were one of us! What were you doing hiding in that cave?'

'I didn't want you to kill Tragon.'

'But the Ephors sent us!'

Phylleidas looked up, smiling, easier now that the pressure of the bandage was keeping his torn flesh together. 'That's why. You wouldn't have stopped in the name of any God, if I could have made you know it was not just!'

'No! Are you a better judge than the state?'

And, 'Yes!' said Phylleidas. The man stared at him once more, then got up and beckoned to one of the others. Phylleidas watched them quite happily for a moment or two; they were in a different world. But then he saw them pointing up-stream, and one of them looking carefully along the cliffs at each side, for places where anyone could climb. He got on to his feet. 'Oh, what are you doing?' he said.

The older man spoke over his shoulder: 'What we were ordered. Killing a helot.' And he laughed.

'Oh no!' said Phylleidas. 'You can't! That's finished –' and he stumbled towards him, horridly feeling that his own voice was somehow odd as if it had picked

up new tones and sharpnesses from the helot! He caught at them anyhow, their hands, their knees: 'Oh by all the Gods!' he said, 'stop! You don't understand! He was my friend!'

But one after another they got away from him, till only the older man was left. Phylleidas sat down on a stone and began to cry. After a time the man spoke: 'I think you must be mad, Phylleidas. But, mad or not, you have tried to stop the Krypteia and you have killed the hounds of the Krypteia. You have said you are a friend to a helot whom the State has judged to death. You have cried and screamed like a woman, before men younger than yourself. What are you going to do?'

Phylleidas said: 'I don't know.' He was not really much interested in what he had been doing.

'You have gone against the State, you have disowned your citizenship,' the man went on, and suddenly stooped and shook him. 'Listen in the name of the Twins, Phylleidas! Look at me! We shall have to tell the Ephors; you will be disgraced; you can't stay a citizen after this; no one will speak to you!'

'Well?' said Phylleidas. It was all going over his head like cloud shadows.

The man was finding it very hard to speak. At last he picked up the sword from where it lay by the second hound. 'I offer you honour,' he said, 'if you choose to kill yourself now, we can make a story. No one but the Ephors need know. I have sent the young men away. I will help you.' Phylleidas took the sword: 'What am I to do with it?'

'Put the point over your heart – so: between the bones. Fall forward on to it. It is very quick and hurts less than dishonour. I will see it goes true, Phylleidas.'

But suddenly Phylleidas began to laugh, as violently as he had been crying before. 'I can't help it,' he said, 'Don't look like that! It tickled. Oh why are you all so different from me?'

The man said nothing for about a minute, then, very slowly: 'Phylleidas, you are trying to make me think you are really mad. But the Ephors won't take that. They'll judge you for what you have done, not what you are. It's no use.'

Phylleidas sheathed the sword with a click; he seemed to be feeling his hurt arm again. 'I'm not mad,' he said, 'but I'm very sleepy.' He stumbled over to the edge of the river-bed under the cliffs where there was a strip of fine shingle and weeds, and lay down all in a piece and was asleep before his loose hand had slipped off his knee on to the ground.

The sunlight slid up the trees and up the sky and away; it was nearly night. Theano came up into the ravine and saw her husband lying in the river-bed and the other man watching beside him. She had been coming slowly because of her headache, but now she broke into a kind of miserable run. 'What have you done?' she said.

'Nothing,' said the man, rather grimly.

'Then – has he?'

'Look at him, girl, whoever you are! Look at him, the pig!'

'Oh,' said Theano, 'he's asleep, not dead!' And she

began to laugh with her hands up at her temples. 'Oh, he's asleep!'

'Yes,' said the man, and kicked him as hard as he could.

Theano screamed, but Phylleidas only moved a little in his sleep and seemed to smile. 'So!' said Theano, and picked up a stone in both hands and swung it back shoulder-high for the throw.

'Wait till you hear!' said the Spartiate quickly, his hands up to guard himself, all the same. 'You are his wife?' Theano nodded, but still held the stone ready. 'Well, then: the man wasn't there, but *he* was' – and he nodded towards Phylleidas – 'and he killed our blood-hounds – look. And he tried to stop us, though he knew what orders we were under. He will lose his citizenship for that. I offered him the way out; I would have held the sword for him. But he would not take it – he laughed!'

Theano went over to Phylleidas and sat down beside him, screwing up her eyes and saying nothing yet. She picked up his bandaged arm, heavy with the depth of his sleep. 'Was that you?' she said.

'The hound – before we could get it off. Is he mad?'

'He is not mad,' said Theano, 'but he is singing a song of his own, against ours.'

'I don't understand. If he had killed himself you would be left in honour now.'

Theano shivered. 'He knows what I want better than you do.'

'And your children?'

'Will they be less good than they would have been?'

He shrugged his shoulders. 'If you choose to refuse them the best thing in life –! But what are you going to do, Theano, daughter of Euboidas?'

'Nothing. If all this was so true for him that he' – she hesitated a moment with her hand against her forehead – 'that he took these risks, then it is real, isn't it? As real as our things. And we have to accept it.' She took off her thick veil and threw it over Phylleidas, tucking it in at the sides, for the dew was beginning to fall heavily, and hunched herself up with her arms crossed over her breasts to keep as warm as she could. The Spartiate had a long stick and was using it to lever up roots and stones and make a hole to bury the hounds. When he had done that he came and sat down on a flat stone at the foot of the cliff opposite Theano.

The stars came out through the pine-tops and swung round and over; the moon followed and climbed to a high chilly midnight, and slid slowly down, dimming whatever stars she passed. Theano drowsed and woke and drowsed again, stiffly and painfully. Her feet and legs and the outsides of her arms got so cold that she could feel nothing else. Phylleidas slept on without moving the tiniest muscle anywhere; his slow even breath made no sound till she leant right over to him, anxiously, and laid her head just by his.

The Spartiate looked up and spoke to her across the river-bed in the stillness: 'I think they're coming back.'

She blinked herself wide awake and took a deep cold breath of moon-grey air.

'If they killed, there will be no need to tell the Ephors.'

But there was no answer to this.

After a time the other three came trailing back, one of them limping. The elder man and Theano got up and stood together in the middle of the ravine to meet them. When they were all there he asked: 'Well?'

The next eldest answered: 'We've lost him. We beat all over the woods for him, we've been up into the dry hills. But we'd not much chance without the hounds. Then Kalokleinas fell over a root and hurt his foot. If we could get another hound –'

'No good. He'll have fouled his trail by now, got on to stone most likely or else among the goats.'

'We did everything we could have done.'

'It's the first time for years we've failed.'

They all glared at Phylleidas sleeping through it all. Theano stood in front of him. 'It's my loss as well as yours!' she said rather shakily. 'I wanted the kill. But the Gods aren't always with one.'

'This was one man, not the Gods,' said Kalokleinas, the limping one, and stared at Theano.

'He was possessed by something: not himself, not man-like. I know him.' She felt she was fighting now.

'It wasn't the work of any Gods I know – some Stranger perhaps! Did he rape a priestess in Argos?' said the older man, spitting.

And then the other: 'Or was it some helot mud-God he's been paying vows to?'

'And who's to pay us for this night and a shame on the Krypteia?'

'Yes, who?' said Kalokleinas, and caught Theano by the wrist.

She stood still, wondering very quickly whether to call Phylleidas, whether if she did she would be able to wake him out of this queer sleep. No, she would not call yet. 'What good will it be if I pay?' she said. 'It will be a bigger shame on the Krypteia then!' He had her wrist just where the Ephor had held it and bruised it in the morning: she clenched her hand and went on in a low voice, trying to keep her knees tense against the trembling that was running down them. 'We are all Spartiate here; need you mind that I saw you come back with clean swords? Nobody not of us will know.' She looked up, over the cliff top, keeping her eyes from any meeting with the shining eyes of the young men. She felt them closing in on her, the warmth of them brushing her cold arm.

'Nobody need know anything that happens to-night!' said Kalokleinas.

'But it's not night any longer!' she said with his breath on her cheek. 'Look, look, there's dawn fighting against the moon!' As she spoke a light wind came blowing down the ravine and all the leaves on the trees whispered; some tension seemed to relax round her among the Krypteia. 'You're tired,' she said, 'all tired. Sleep, I will keep watch.'

And, 'Sleep,' said the older man, 'the sun will be warm soon.'

One by one they fell away from her, with sleep coming on to them, and curled themselves up wherever the stones left a space, and slept.

Theano sat down again beside her husband and began weaving rushes together to keep herself from

falling asleep too. The moon sank through the trees. Gradually she began to see what she was doing. Some way off, in the wood, a bird woke and chirped, then another. Colours crept back into the world. She leant over to Phylleidas and felt his hand; it was not very warm and he stirred a little to her touch. Across the river bed, the elder man was awake and looking at her, with his cloak wrapped thickly over his arms and shoulders. Theano spoke very suddenly, every word darting like a little bird through the still air between them: 'How are you saving the honour of your Krypteia?'

Taken unawares, the man stared back at her and answered heavily: 'I must speak the truth to the Ephors.'

'And about my husband?'

'The truth.'

'And about me?'

'There's nothing to say.'

'But suppose I tell them – well, a little more than the truth, about last night and your young men?'

'They won't believe you.'

'I can make them believe me.'

'They won't care.'

'Oh, but they will! When I tell them that I, Theano, daughter of Euboidas, was lured here –'

The man shifted uncomfortably. 'Anyway, it won't save *him*!'

'No. But it will hurt you – you and the others – badly.'

The man got up and came over to her. 'What do you want, Theano, daughter of Euboidas?'

She made room for him beside her, at Phylleidas' feet. 'I want you to tell a lie for me. Say you killed the helot and he killed your hounds. After all it was because of him. And say nothing about my husband.'

'That's a big lie you're asking me for.'

'Well, is it?' she said. 'You see, it's for good every way. The helot will be out of the country; he's not one to stay and lead revolts. Phylleidas will come back and be one of us – not different any more. And he and I will have our children and stay part of the whole, and the song will not be broken.'

'But – suppose he's still mad?'

'It was only about this one thing; and now it's over.' She lifted her eyes to his. 'Well, here's a bargain. Wait till he wakes; if he's still mad you shall say what you like – the truth if you must. If not, give me my lie.'

'But my young men: suppose they don't agree?' He clutched on to that, because he found that, quite against his will, he appeared to have agreed to something he never meant!

'I'll talk to them myself,' said Theano. 'Don't you think so?' She laughed rather quiveringly.

'You're a little wench and a half!' said the man. 'I wish you were my wife, not his! Give me a kiss.'

Theano crooked her fingers together tightly and looked down at Phylleidas. 'Very well,' she said and turned her face round to be kissed.

The sun tilted over the edge of the ravine, pushing the shadow down the low cliff and the mouth of the cave. Immediately the damp chill of night fled out of

the air; Theano stretched out her arms, turning them this way and that to it. She began to smell the pines, more and more strongly every moment. Kalokleinas woke and then the other two young men. And at last, when the sun had covered him, had soaked him head to foot with warmth, Phylleidas woke too, and yawned and heaved himself lazily up. Theano stood away a little under a holm oak that stretched branches right across the river-bed; she clung on to the biggest with stiff pricked fingers, praying, vowing quickly to Artemis and the Twins, because in a minute she would know. At first he only saw the others. He looked at them unblinkingly for quite a long time. 'You didn't get him,' he said. No one answered, and he nodded. 'You won't now. He's too clever. Once he told Chilon and me –' And then he checked himself, looking round. 'It's day,' he said. 'I've slept a long time. Will one of you tie this bandage again?' He held out his arm. The elder man was whispering to Kalokleinas, but one of the others came and did it. Theano wanted to, but she had to stay hidden; still she did not know, either way.

'Has anyone got any food?' he said again. 'I had nothing much yesterday. I'm hungry now.'

'I've not,' said the man who was doing the bandage, shortly, and made the knot firm with teeth and fingers.

He picked up a stone with his other hand and shied it casually across the ravine; then he looked downstream, towards the holm oak. 'You're here,' he said, 'after all.' And he held out his hands to her. She let go of the tree and came to him with her vows answered.

They stood together, facing the Krypteia. He said, 'It's finished!'

And she said to them: 'You see; he's back.'

And the older man said: 'Yes. I do see. I think you're right.'

She went back to the place where Phylleidas had lain, and picked up her veil. Some of it had dried in the sun and some was still dewy and cold in its roughness. She was very, very tired and her head ached again. But Phylleidas was borrowing a little oil from Kalokleinas to wash with; no one had a comb. He laughed, and after a minute or two she saw that Kalokleinas was laughing too. They both went past her to the flat green pool that was made by the water dripping from the cave, and knelt down and began dabbling in it with their hands and arms. An end of the bandage dropped into the water, and Kalokleinas reached over and tucked it away. The other two young ones joined them. Theano leant against the bank. She wondered, without hate, without much interest even, where the helot was now; she wondered how long it would be before rain would come and wash away the stains of the hounds' blood; she wondered when she could get home and what everyone would say; she hoped they wouldn't ask her too many questions before she could go away and sleep; she wished she could go and dabble in the wet pool with the men. It would be hot and dusty walking back, even by the field path. The elder man had a piece of black bread in the fold of his cloak. He took it out and began slowly cutting it up on a flat stone: a piece for each of the Krypteia, a piece for Phylleidas,and a piece for her.

SOPHROSYNE CASTLE

I come to the walls of your castle,
Crying to you: unfasten
Those cold bolts that have made you to be master

Of delicate things and phrases,
The childish, fine amazement
At a strange evil world, disordered and crazy.

I know, I know that within there
You have slow wheels spinning
Threads for a purer, whiter, lovelier linen

Than the bridal veil of the Beauty
Whom elfen spindles muted
In a castle with yet sharper thorns round it rooting.

There are your mirrors reflecting,
In some strange light deflected,
Life one calm, sane sea that no hopes need be wrecked in.

And there is your special magic
Of thoughts too sweet and fragile
For all but inwardest-lookers to imagine,

And yet so tense and so certain,
In timeless gardens nurtured,
That your sharp tortuous probings can never hurt them.

And there is the gift of the fairies,
Oh brightest yet and rarest:
That arrowy quick laughter testing and tearing

All the things people call realest,
Thick values and feelings,
And all the standards and rights of the men who talked to Melos!

These are your dear possessions,
They make a net whose meshes
May bind chaos to order and a calm deep and precious.

And they lie, oh wisdom makers,
Very brittle and naked,
With almost a whole world waiting the chance to break them.

I know how well you must guard them
With no strength to pardon
One who should drop his shield though the fight were hardest

But, spite steel hacked and dented,
I know, too, how gentle
The eyes and hearts looking for peace of your tight-lipped sentries.

And I say: I know, I know too,
Oh friends, how slowly
One makes one's dam against great waters deeply-flowing.

I could be as bold a fighter
As your bravest, oath-plighting,
See, my sword too is sharp, my tall torch lighted.

I stand by the walls of your castle,
Oh now, for the last time,
Now, now, while the hour lasts, be brave and unfasten!

PLUTARCH, IN A LETTER, TO HIS BROTHER LAMPRIAS

. . . Now about this time it happened that two thousand of the Helots who had fought in those battles were chosen out by the Spartans, enfranchised and led round the temples, garlanded and in the dress of freemen. But after a time it seemed to the Spartans that this way they must needs encourage revolt and free-speaking among the rest of the Helots. So they gave a great feast to all those newly enfranchised in a certain city of Sparta; the tables were set in ten great halls of wood with thatched roofs, and when the feasting was at its height the Spartans slipt out one by one, and barred the doors and set fire to the houses and stood around with spears, lest any of the Helots might escape from out of the flames. And among them there was a young man, by name Evalcus, who was an Iren and had fought in this war beside the Helots, but yet was glad that they should be burnt alive, since he believed in all the ways of his fathers. Now the Helots in that house were roused by the smell of burning, and burst open the doors and rushed out, but they came on the spears, and either were pierced by them, and so died, or else were driven back into the flames. And one of the Helots lay on the ground with a spear-thrust through his shoulder,

but yet not dead; and this Evalcus would have dispatched him with his dagger, but that he saw his face, and staying his hand, cried out loudly to the young men about him, saying that the man had saved his life in the battle and now he would be the saviour. But yet the rest of the Spartans would have slain him with the others, and there were high words spoken; but the Helot said nothing.

Then, since Evalcus was not to be persuaded to let the man be slain, he was taken up and bound and led before the Elders, who at first would have nothing to say but that he must die, yet at last, Evalcus pleading with them all the time, they said he should indeed live, but by no means as a freeman. One of the Elders, then, going up to him, tore off his head the wreath, and off his body the Spartan dress, which he yet wore, and struck him in the face, at which the Helot, weeping, said, 'It would be better to die.'

At once Evalcus took him by the hand and spoke to the assembly: 'With all respect and honour due to you, oh Elders, I must yet question whether a just sentence has been given. For indeed the Helot has done no wrong, except that he was fathered by one sort of man rather than another, but surely right in that he has received danger and wounds with us. And you have punished him with the hardest thing that lies in your power, for I ask you what worse can come to a man than, once having been free, to be made bond?' Then, seeing that the Elders were a little moved, he went on: 'My Friend is dead of his wounds; and it seems to me just that I should take as my new Friend this man who

saved my life in the battle.' At that the Elders, thinking it too great a shame that a free-born Spartan should have a Helot for Friend, gave out that the man should again be made free; which was done. And he joyfully went with Evalcus to his house, who later gave him his sister to wife.

But yet no good came of it; since not only could the Helot never get admission to one of those little companies of Spartans who ate together, but also his wife was mocked by the other women for living with a slave. And she, being then with child, cast herself down from a high rock of Taygetus and so died. Nor did her husband live long after her.

And indeed, my dear Lamprias, I can well credit this story, since I myself have seen of what a proud and unforgetting nature the men of Lacedæmon are up to this day. Let us be glad, then, that we were not bred up in the harsh schools of Sparta, but under the good Ammonius, to whom, I pray you, bear greeting from me.

SONG

When a thing comes to be written
It stops being true:
As it stands on the page no longer, no longer,
Oh no longer you!

So a new-born baby out of
Your body's very core:
Next he lies in his cot a stranger, a stranger,
Part of your life no more.

These were my words this morning,
In my mind they grew.
Now someone else can have them, can have them,
I will have new!

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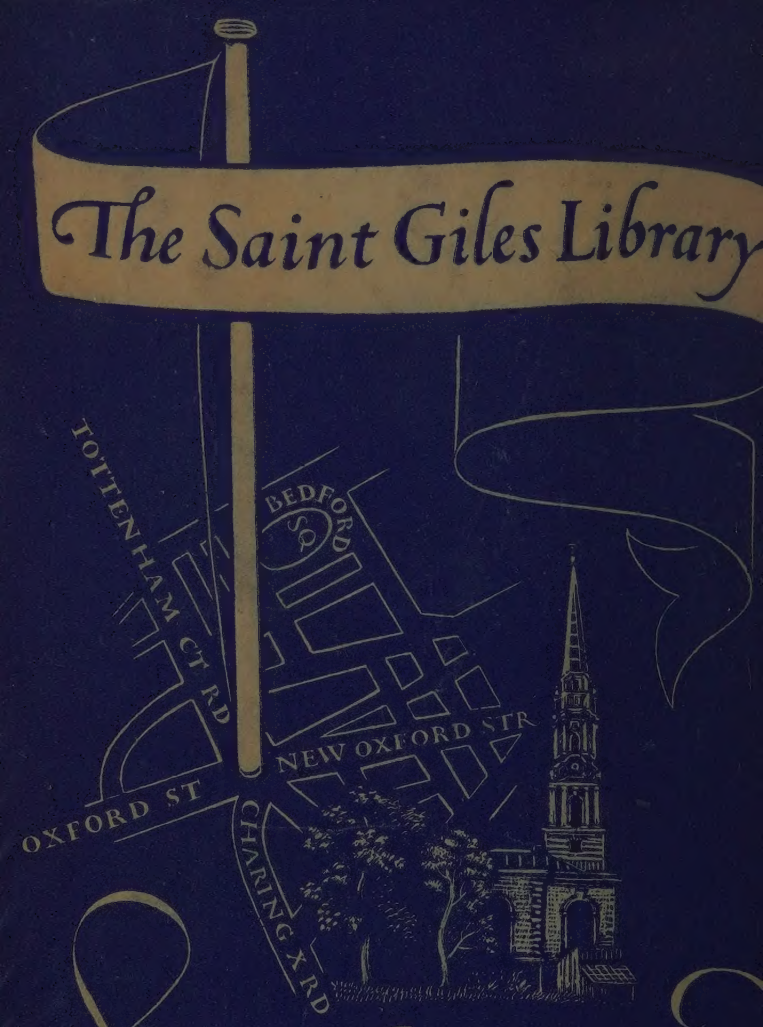
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